

1917  
H68

Holman

The Attitude of the Presbyterian Church  
in the United States  
toward American Slavery

The person charging this material is responsible for its return to the library from which it was withdrawn on or before the **Latest Date** stamped below.

Theft, mutilation, and underlining of books are reasons for disciplinary action and may result in dismissal from the University.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

**BUILDING USE ONLY**

OCT 1 1979

OCT 1 1979

L161—O-1096

THE ATTITUDE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
IN THE UNITED STATES TOWARDS  
AMERICAN SLAVERY

BY

ELMO PAUL HOHMAN

A. B. University of Illinois, 1916

---

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

IN HISTORY

IN

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

1917





1917  
H68

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

May 29 1917

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPER-  
VISION BY Elmo Paul Hohman

ENTITLED The Attitude of the Presbyterian  
Church in the United States toward Slavery

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF Master of Arts

Evarts B. Greene

In Charge of Thesis

Head of Department

Recommendation concurred in:\*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Committee

on

Final Examination\*

\*Required for doctor's degree but not for master's.

376535

5 Feb. 18 Cilley



## Table of Contents

	page
Chapter I - Introduction: Religion As a Factor in National Life . . . . .	1
Chapter II - The Early Position of the Church . . . . .	7
Chapter III - The Deliverance of 1818 . . . . .	19
Chapter IV - Abolitionism and the Church . . . . .	26
Chapter V - The Great Schism . . . . .	44
Chapter VI - The Attitude of the Old School . . . . .	58
Chapter VII - Slavery and the New Church . . . . .	68
Chapter VIII - The Church, the Slave, and the Dollar . . .	84
Chapter IX - The Final Overthrow of Slavery . . . . .	97
Appendix - Chronological Resume of the Official Action of the American Presbyterian Church on Slavery. From the Earliest Times Up to 1865 . . . . .	108
Bibliography . . . . .	113



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2013

<http://archive.org/details/attitudeofpresby00hohm>

## THE ATTITUDE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES TOWARDS AMERICAN SLAVERY

### Chapter I. - Introduction: Religion As a Factor in National Life.

Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of American religious history in the nineteenth century may be found in the fact that its serious consideration was confined very largely to theological seminaries and ecclesiastical assemblies. Partly as a cause, and partly as a result, of such confinement, the history of contemporary American religion assumed a hue which was decidedly denominational and sectarian. Each individual sect chronicled the events of its own life and growth fully and completely; but there was no serious attempt to gather up and correlate these various narratives in such a way as to give a unified and composite view of religion as a whole. The recognized religious unit of the time was the denomination, rather than the church as a whole; and consequently most persons were unable to see the forest for the trees. The isolated and detached character of these rigidly independent histories, as well as the relatively small magnitude of the subject-matter, resulted in the very general prevalence of the belief that the place of religion in the broad national life of the people was unimportant and insignificant: an opinion which was still further strengthened by the universal acceptance of the American theory of the complete separation of church and state.

These considerations no doubt go far toward explaining the fact that the general historian, anxious and alert to dis-





cover and evaluate every item which entered into the life of the nation, neglected so long and so utterly the element of religion. While other factors in the development of the United States were given extended attention, religion was relegated to a distinctly subordinate position, and was usually dismissed with a brief mention. It seemed almost as if religion were considered by many persons as something apart, unique, far removed from the ordinary business of life, an attribute of mind which existed only on Sunday, in unavoidable conjunction with starched linen and endless sermons and tedious inactivity, and which was completely forgotten during the ensuing six days of the week. Consequently the general historian, in chronicling the life of the American people, merely reflected the general opinion when he restricted himself for the most part to the events of the weekdays, and bequeathed to the theological professor the thankless task of preserving the record of the Sundays of the nation.

And it is only very recently that an awakening has come, that we have been aroused to a recognition of the rich and undiscovered possibilities offered by this field of religious history. Only within the past few years have we come to appreciate the fact that religion is not an extraneous, parasitic growth upon the life of the nation, but that it is rather an integral, vital, essential, and potent element in that very life. And if this be true in general, it is especially true of America, where the laity has always played such a prominent part in the affairs of the church. The great body of the church laity represents, as it were, a large, representative cross-section of the American people, ready-mounted for the microscope of the examin-



ing historian. J. F. Jameson emphasizes this idea of the importance of religion in the life of the nation in the following words: "There is something to be said for the contention that, of all means of estimating American character from American history, the pursuit of religious knowledge is the most complete. ...He who would understand the American of past and present times, and to that end would provide himself with data representing all classes, all periods, and all regions, may find in the history of American religion the closest approach to the continuous record he desires. Not that all or even most Americans have been religious, but there have been religious men and women in every class, every period, every subdivision of America, and multitudes of them have left individual or collective records of their thoughts and ways and feelings. Millions have felt an interest in religion where thousands have felt an interest in literature or philosophy, in music or art....Moreover, the history of religion in America holds a peculiarly close relation to the general history of the American spirit from the fact that here, more than elsewhere, the concerns of churches have been managed by the laity or in accordance with their will. If ever anywhere ecclesiastical history can be rightly treated as consisting solely of the history of ecclesiastics, certainly it has not been so in the United States."<sup>1</sup> The same general opinion is expressed by Samuel J. May, when he says, in speaking more particularly of one especial period in our national development: "In 1830, and for several years afterwards, the influence of the

<sup>1</sup>Jameson, J.F., American Acta Sanctorum, American Historical Review, XIII, 298-299.





clergy and the churches was paramount in our Northern, if not in the Southern communities; certainly it was second only to the love of money. The people generally, then, were wont to take for granted that what the ministers and church-members approved must be morally right, and what they so vehemently denounced must be morally wrong."<sup>2</sup>

If, then, religion, operating through the church, has been a very real force in our national life, if it has exerted an influence upon the trend of events which, however variously we may evaluate it, has been incontrovertibly far from negligible, is it not time to begin the serious study of this hitherto neglected element? Have we any excuse for ignoring further this factor which has contributed so liberally to the formation and the development of our nation? Must we not recognize, tardily though it may be, that the history of a people cannot be fully and completely and thoroughly written without taking into account its religion? And are we not, therefore, literally forced to the conclusion that in dealing with any of the great national problems which the people of the United States have been called upon, from time to time, to face, we must pay greatly increased attention to the religious element?

And in no case, perhaps, will such attention be more richly rewarded than in that of the slavery question, at once, in many respects, the most vexatious, the most deep-rooted, and the most complicated problem ever before the American people. The character and magnitude of the interests and principles at stake, involving, as they did, great moral and ethical, as well as

<sup>2</sup>May, S.J., Some Recollections of Our Anti-Slavery Conflict, 331.





political and commercial considerations, rendered it both easy and fitting for the church to assume a prominent role in the situation. And it is with the hope of bringing out more clearly the exact nature and influence of this role, of ascertaining, if possible, whether the church was a leading character or only a supernumerary in the great national drama of the slavery problem, that this study has been undertaken. It has been confined largely to one denomination because that seemed the most logical and the most desirable method of delimiting the immense field to be explored; and the choice has fallen upon the Presbyterian church because it was one of the largest and most representative religious bodies involved in the slavery controversy, and because no similar study of this body has been undertaken hitherto, so far as is known to the writer. No attempt has been made to take up the political or other well-known phases of the slavery question, except in so far as they came into contact with the church; but the scope of the work has been confined to a consideration of the churches, and more especially the Presbyterian church as an element in the slavery issue.<sup>3</sup> The following pages are submitted as evidence to show that this hitherto neglected factor was in reality a highly potent one, exerting a very real and powerful influence upon the trend of events.

<sup>3</sup>It has been found necessary also to restrict the subject-matter primarily to the main body of the Presbyterian church, leaving out of account the numerous smaller branches of the denomination, of which as many as twenty-eight were in existence at various times during the period under consideration. The general attitude of these smaller bodies, however, was on the whole more strongly opposed to slavery than that of the main church.



The belief that this task may not be an altogether bootless one, and that this subject is one deserving of more extended consideration in any serious and comprehensive history of the American people, would seem to be confirmed by the following second quotation from J. F. Jameson: "In every period of recorded time, we know that the study of religion casts valuable light on many other aspects of history. Why should it be otherwise with the religious history of America? Unless we are content to confine ourselves to the well-worn grooves of constitutional and political history, and to resign to sciences less cautious than history the broad story of American culture, why should we not seek light from every quarter? Most of all let us seek it from the history of American religion, in the sum total an ample record, even though in parts we have to compose it like a mosaic from fragments of unpromising material."<sup>4</sup> And it is with the sincere hope of being able to aid in the composition of this mosaic by contributing a few additional stones, small and roughly-hewn, yet not, perhaps, without their place, that the following study has been undertaken.

<sup>4</sup>Jameson, J.F., American Acta Sanctorum, American Historical Review, XIII, 302.





## Chapter II. - The Early Position of the Church

The birthplace of American Presbyterianism was Philadelphia; for here, in 1698, was founded the first Presbyterian church in the United States. Very soon thereafter other churches sprang up within the adjoining territory; and in 1705 the first presbytery was organized, with seven ministers in attendance. From this time forward the growth of the denomination was both rapid and continuous. In 1717 the lone presbytery of Philadelphia was transformed into the synod of Philadelphia; in 1745 a second synod, that of New York, was organized; in 1758 these two organizations were consolidated into a single body known as the synod of Philadelphia and New York; and finally, with the formation of the General Assembly in 1789, the government of the church assumed the form which it has retained, with slight modifications, down to the present time.<sup>1</sup>

But it was not until 1774 that the subject of slavery came up in the deliberations of any church body. In the synodical session of that year, however, "a representation from the Rev. Dr. Ezra Stiles and the Rev. Samuel Hopkins, respecting the sending of two natives of Africa on a mission to propagate Christianity in their native country, and a request that the Synod would countenance this undertaking by their approbation of it, was brought in and read."<sup>2</sup> A special committee was appointed to bring in a report on this matter, and also on the subject of negro slavery. After

<sup>1</sup>Engles, Records of Presbyterian Church in United States of America, 6.

<sup>2</sup>Records, 456.





hearing the report of this committee, and "after much reasoning on the matter," it was decided that "the Synod is very happy to have an opportunity to express their readiness to concur with and assist in a mission to the African tribes"; but apparently no action was taken on the second part of the report, pertaining to slavery.<sup>3</sup> For during a review of the minutes in 1780 it was found that "an affair respecting the enslaving of negroes" had been before the synod in 1774, but that it had, "by some means, been passed over" by succeeding synods. It was now discussed in 1780, but again without any definite action.<sup>4</sup>

It is only in 1786, therefore, that we find the first actual deliverance on the question of slavery, when, in the quaint phraseology of the minutes of that year, "the following case of conscience from Donegall Presbytery was overtured, viz., whether Christian masters, or mistresses, ought, in duty, to have such children baptized as are under their care, though born of parents not in the communion of any Christian church?" And also "whether Christian slaves, having children at the entire direction of unchristian masters, and not having it in their power to instruct them in religion, are bound to have them baptized; and whether a gospel minister in this predicament ought to baptize them?" The synod decided all of these questions in the affirmative.<sup>5</sup>

The next year, in 1787, a more extended deliverance was given which struck the keynote of the attitude maintained by the church throughout this early period down to 1820. After being called upon by the committee of overtures to "recommend, in the

<sup>3</sup>Records, 459.

<sup>4</sup>Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church in United States of America, I, 201.

<sup>5</sup>Records, 527.



warmest terms, to every member of their body, and to all the churches and families under their care, to do everything in their power, consistent with the rights of civil society, to promote the abolition of slavery, and the instruction of negroes, whether bond or free," the synod finally adopted the following resolution as expressing its views on slavery: "The Synod of Philadelphia and New York do highly approve of the general principles in favour of universal liberty, that prevail in America, and the interest which many of the states have taken in promoting the abolition of slavery; yet, inasmuch as men introduced from a servile state to a participation of all the privileges of civil society, without a proper education, and without previous habits of industry, may be, in many respects, dangerous to the community, therefore they earnestly recommend it to all the members belonging to their commission, to give those persons who are at present held in servitude, such good education as to prepare them for the better enjoyment of freedom; and they moreover recommend that masters, wherever they find servants disposed to make a just improvement of the privilege, would give them a peculium, or grant them sufficient time and sufficient means of procuring their own liberty at a moderate rate, that thereby, they may be brought into society with those habits of industry that may render them useful citizens; and finally, they recommend it to all their people to use the most prudent measures, consistent with the interest and the state of civil society, in the counties where they live, to procure eventually the final abolition of slavery in America."<sup>6</sup> In short, the synod favored abolition and emancipation, but not without first provid-

<sup>6</sup>Records, 540.





ing for the education and industrial training of the negroes.

Two years later, in 1789, the organization of the church was strengthened and centralized by the formation of the General Assembly; but it was not until 1793 that the question of slavery came up before this new body. And then, in answer to a memorial on slavery signed by Warner Mifflin, a member of the Society of Friends, the delegates contented themselves with ordering that the records of the synod of the year 1787, on the subject of slavery, be published amongst the extracts of the proceedings of the Assembly.<sup>7</sup> In 1794 the following note to the eighth commandment was adopted by the Assembly, and ordered to be included in the Confession of Faith: "I Timothy 1:10. The law is made for man-stealers....The word...in its original import, comprehends all who are concerned in bringing any of the human race into slavery, or retaining them in it....Stealers of men are those who bring off slaves or freemen, and keep, sell, or buy them."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Minutes, 1793, 76.

<sup>8</sup>This note later led to considerable discussion. In the Assembly of 1816 the Philadelphia Presbytery, in a memorial, called attention to the fact that it had never been submitted to the presbyteries for approval. As a result of this objection, the Assembly decided to omit the note on man-stealing from the question, "What is forbidden in the eighth commandment?" But it was specifically stated that in directing this omission "they were influenced by far other motives than any desire to favor slavery, or to retard the extinction of that mournful evil as speedily as may consist with the happiness of all concerned." Still later, in 1836, the General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring that the action of 1794 was "introduced irregularly, - never had the sanction of the Church, and therefore never possessed any authority. "There is no evidence to show that the church ever attempted to reduce to practice the abstract doctrine set forth in this note; and later abolition writers frequently mentioned the whole affair as proof of the insincerity of the church in its position regarding slavery. For the complete text, and a full discussion of the note, see Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 238; Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 151-154, 107; and Birney, American Churches, 26.





In 1795, in answer to an overture from Transylvania Presbytery, inquiring "whether a serious and conscientious person, a member of a Presbyterian congregation, who views the slavery of the negroes as a moral evil," ought to hold Christian communion with slaveholders, the Assembly directed that the deliverance of 1787 be republished, and also resolved "that as the same difference of opinion with respect to slavery takes place in sundry other parts of the Presbyterian Church, notwithstanding which they live in charity and peace according to the doctrine and practice of the Apostles, it is hereby recommended to all conscientious persons, and especially those whom it immediately respects, to do the same. At the same time, the General Assembly assures all the churches under their care, that they view, with the deepest concern, any vestiges of slavery which may exist in our country." At the same time a committee was appointed to draw up a letter to be addressed to the presbytery of Transylvania. After carefully debating the report of this committee paragraph by paragraph, and "after very considerable time spent therein," the letter was finally adopted in the following form: "Dear Friends and Brethern - The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church hear with concern from your commissioners, that differences of opinion with respect to holding Christian communion with those possessed of slaves, agitate the minds of some among you, and threaten divisions which may have the most ruinous tendency....The General Assembly have taken every step which they deemed expedient or wise, to encourage emancipation, and to render the state of those who are in slavery as mild and tolerable as possible. Forbearance and peace are frequently inculcated and enjoined in the New Testament....If



every difference of opinion were to keep men at a distance, they could subsist in no state of society, either civil or religious."<sup>9</sup>

For a long period of twenty years after this deliverance of 1795 the General Assembly took no official action on slavery worthy of mention. A few memorials were handed in from time to time; but the memorialists were invariably referred to some past statement of this highest church council. The Assembly was simply resting on its oars and drifting with the tide of public opinion, without attempting to stem or to deflect that tide in any conscious manner.

But if the main body was silent, a few of the lower judicatories did, from time to time, take some action. One of the most interesting of such cases occurred in the presbytery of South Carolina in 1796, in which were displayed the first faint flickerings of the proslavery sentiment which was later to burst into such a devouring flame. The congregation at Broadaway, South Carolina, had forwarded a call to the presbytery for the pastoral services of James Gilleland; but in July, 1796, a remonstrance against his ordination, signed by twelve members of the congregation, was presented, on the ground that he had preached against slavery. After an extended discussion, Gilleland at length consented to remain silent on the subject of slavery in the pulpit,

<sup>9</sup> Minutes, 1795, 103-104. See footnote on page 104 of the minutes for full, original form of this letter, including the portions stricken out during the discussion. The portions omitted emphasize the inexpediency of immediate emancipation, before the slaves have been properly trained and educated. For instance, it is stated that "a slave let loose upon society, ignorant, idle, and headstrong, is in a state to injure others, and to ruin himself. No Christian master can answer for such conduct to his own mind. The slave must first be in a position to act properly as a member of civil society, before he can advantageously be introduced therein."





unless the consent of the presbytery were first obtained. Thereupon the ordination ceremony was duly performed.

But in November of the same year Gilleland memorialized the synod of the Carolinas, stating his conscientious difficulties in remaining silent on the question of emancipation, and asking to be relieved from the prohibition imposed by the presbytery. After careful deliberation, however, the synod upheld the opinion of the presbytery, stating "that to preach publicly against slavery, in the present circumstances, and to lay down as the duty of everyone, to liberate those who are under their care, is what would lead to disorder, and open the way to confusion," and advised Gilleland "to be content with using his utmost endeavors in private to open the way for emancipation." The young minister chafed under this repression for eight years; but finally in 1804, further silence became unbearable, and he resigned his pastorate and moved to Ohio, where for many years he was an ardent anti-slavery member of the presbytery of Chillicothe.<sup>10</sup> Another illustration of this early proslavery sentiment occurred in 1794, when certain leading men of the same presbytery of South Carolina selected Dr. Thomas Reese to preach a sermon in refutation of the charges brought forward by Rev. W. C. Davis, who had denounced all of his fellow-christians who owned slaves. "This reply of Reese met with the entire approbation of the presbytery, and greatly mortified Davis, this early advocate of abolition, in 1794."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church I, 365-366; Howe, History of Presbyterian Church in South Carolina, I, 634-635; Siebert, Underground Railroad, 32, 95; Thompson, Presbyterians, 122.

<sup>11</sup> Howe, History of Presbyterian Church in South Carolina, I, 638.





About this same time, however, the synod of Kentucky was strongly and bitterly opposed to slavery. In 1793 this body adopted an address couched in the following terms: "Slavery depraves and degrades the slave by removing him from the strongest natural checks to human corruption....How horrible must that system be which, in the opinion of its strongest advocates demands, as a necessary condition of its existence, that knowledge be shut out from the minds of those who live under it; that they should be reduced as near as possible to the level of the brutes, and that the powers of their souls should be crushed. They have no access to the Scriptures, to a regular Gospel ministry, and to the domestic means of grace. They suffer all that can be inflicted by wanton caprice, by grasping avarice, by brutal lust, by malignant and by insane anger."<sup>12</sup> Four years later, at the annual meeting of the synod of the Carolinas at Sugar Creek, North Carolina, on October 2, 1800, an overture was introduced which asked the synod to enter into a correspondence with other religious denominations in the state, for the purpose of petitioning the legislature to provide for the emancipation of slaves on the principle that all children of slaves born after a fixed date should be free. The committee on overtures reported that

<sup>12</sup>Smith, Political History of Slavery, I, 4. The synod of Kentucky formed more or less of a storm-center for slavery discussion throughout the antebellum period. On the whole, it maintained a fairly consistent testimony in opposition to the evils of slavery; but it favored colonization and gradual amelioration rather than immediate emancipation, and was therefore bitterly antagonistic to the abolitionist propaganda. During the years immediately preceding the Civil War it assumed a rather marked apologetic attitude on the slavery issue. We shall have occasion to refer to this body again during the course of the following chapters.



the time was not yet ripe for such action, but advised all members of the synod to provide for the instruction of their slaves and to prepare them for a proper enjoyment of a state of freedom.<sup>13</sup>

For the long period of fifteen years after this there is no record of any significant action or expression of sentiment on slavery, either by the General Assembly or by any lower judicatory. But in 1815 the presentation of several memorials to the Assembly led that body to resolve that "the General Assembly have repeatedly declared their cordial approbation of those principles of civil liberty which appear to be recognized by the Federal and State governments in these United States. They have expressed their regret that the slavery of the Africans, and of their descendants, still continues in so many places, and even among those within the pale of the church, and have urged the Presbyteries under their care to adopt such measures as will secure at least to the rising generation of slaves, within the bounds of the church, a religious education, that they may be prepared for the exercise and enjoyment of liberty, when God in his providence may open a door for their emancipation.

[Here the memorialists are referred to the deliverances of 1787 and of 1795.] The Assembly observe that although in some sections of our country, under certain circumstances, the transfer of slaves may be unavoidable, yet they consider the buying and selling of slaves by way of traffic, and all undue severity in the management of them, as inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel. And they recommend it to the Presbyteries and Sessions

<sup>13</sup> Foote, Sketches of North Carolina, 504.





under their care, to make use of all prudent measures to prevent such shameful and unrighteous conduct."<sup>14</sup>

In its session on May 23, 1816, the Assembly followed up this testimony by declaring "that it is the duty of masters who are members of the church to present the children of parents in servitude to the ordinance of baptism, provided they are in a position to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, thus securing to them the rich advantages which the gospel provides;" and "that it is the duty of Christ's ministers to inculcate this doctrine, and to baptize all children of this description when presented by their masters."<sup>15</sup>

In summarizing, then, the attitude of the church during this early period of the slavery issue, we may say that it recognized slavery as a great evil; that it condemned particularly the abuses which grew out of the system; that it did not, however, favor immediate and unconditional emancipation, because it believed the negroes to be incapable of meeting the duties and responsibilities of freedom; that it advocated the removal of this incapacity by the proper training and education; and that, whenever the slaves, at some rather vague and indefinite time in the future, should be deemed ready for meeting the problems of freemen, it would then heartily endorse their emancipation. This last point, however, was brought out in a manner tacit and implied, rather than expressly stated and strongly emphasized.

In assuming this position the church was simply reflecting the best public opinion of the time. The thinking men of the nation had come to view slavery as an anomalous iniquity

<sup>14</sup>Minutes, 1815, 585-586.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 1816, 617.



which had no proper place amongst American institutions of democracy and equality: a belief which was rendered the more easy of acceptance by the growing unprofitableness of the practice. This viewpoint led naturally to an increasing advocacy and expectation of emancipation. There are many indications in the literature of the period that slavery was becoming more and more unpopular, and that this feeling was gradually permeating all classes of society. Thus Jefferson, as early as 1781, said: "I think a change already perceptible since the origin of the present war. The spirit of the master is abating, that of the slave rising from the dust, his condition mollifying, the way I hope preparing, under the auspices of heaven, for a total emancipation, and that this is disposed, in the order of events, to be with the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation." However, he adds that "a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation, is among possible events;" and "the Almighty has no attribute which can side with us in such a contest."<sup>16</sup> D. R. Goodloe, in a work published in 1858, quotes an imposing number of extracts from the writings of leading men of the time who condemned the slave-trade and deprecated slavery. The list includes the names of Washington, Jefferson, Franklin, John Adams, James Wilson, James Madison, Rufus King, Gouverneur Morris, Edmund Randolph, Roger Sherman, Luther Martin, George Mason, John Dickinson, Patrick Henry, and other men of scarcely less note.<sup>17</sup> The significance and the representative character of these leaders would seem to constitute a sufficient warrant for the statements that "if there is one thing clearly estab-

<sup>16</sup> Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, 272.

<sup>17</sup> Goodloe, Southern Platform, 4-40.





lished, it is that slavery was deprecated by the men who formed the Constitution....We must conclude that they were percipient witnesses to the public sentiment of that day. There was no State free from the taint of slavery, and the feeling that it was injurious to society was in no sense dependent upon sectional lines. Its ultimate extinction was generally confidently expected: emancipation was to be the rule."<sup>18</sup> Even Rev. F. A. Ross, a strong Southern proslavery champion, in writing to an antislavery opponent in the heat of the controversy in 1857, admits that "the time was when you had the very public sentiment you are now trying to form. From Maine to Louisiana, the American mind was softly yielding to the impress of emancipation, in some hope, however vague and imaginary. Southern as well as Northern men, in the church and out of it, not having sufficiently studied the word of God, and under our own and French revolutionary excitement, looking only at the evils of slavery, wished it away from the land."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Smith, Political History of Slavery, I, 2.

<sup>19</sup>Ross, Position of the Southern Church, 10. This passage occurs in a letter written to Albert Barnes, the New School antislavery champion, during the course of a debate on slavery. This device of a series of open letters between two individuals, usually a Southerner and a Northerner, was a favorite one for securing consideration of the slavery issue throughout the antebellum period, and was especially popular in church circles.





### Chapter III. - The Deliverance of 1818.

The culmination of the action taken by the church in pursuance of the attitude of consistent, yet qualified condemnation of slavery delineated in the preceding chapter came in 1818. In that year the General Assembly adopted a lengthy resolution which has since been considered the classic deliverance of the church on the slavery question. It fixed the high-water mark of the expression of sentiment against slavery. Thereafter, until the very eve of the Civil War, the position assumed became more and more opportunist and semi-apologetic. The action of the year 1818 stands, as it were, upon the very crest of the watershed of Presbyterian policy with regard to slavery. Looking backward, we see a denomination advocating emancipation, but not until a rather shadowy time in the future when the negroes should be prepared for it; in looking forward, however, our gaze meets a church whose position becomes more and more involved and equivocal, and which, while it deprecates the evils and abuses of slavery, yet allows its course to deviate widely from the straight path of unqualified opposition to the system. Therefore the deliverance of this year merits a somewhat careful and detailed consideration.

During the session of June 1, 1818, held at Philadelphia, a resolution was introduced to the effect that "a person who shall sell as a slave a member of the Church, who shall be at the time of sale in good standing in the church, and unwilling to be sold, acts inconsistently with the spirit of Christianity, and ought to be debarred from the communion of the



Church."<sup>1</sup> This resolution was referred to a committee of three, consisting of Dr. Ashbel Green, Dr. Baxter, and Mr. Burgess, with instructions to prepare a full report expressing the general opinion of the Assembly on slavery. Accordingly a paper was presented on the following day which was unanimously adopted as meeting with the full and unqualified approval of the Assembly.

This document begins with the very definite and unequivocal statement that "we consider the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another, as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature; as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, which requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves; and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the Gospel of Christ, which enjoin that, 'all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.'"<sup>2</sup> After thus striking the keynote of the resolution, the committee continues, in elaboration of this sentiment: "Slavery creates a paradox in the moral system - it exhibits rational, accountable, and immortal beings, in such circumstances as scarcely to leave them the power of moral action.... It is manifestly the duty of all christians who enjoy the light of the present day, when the inconsistency of slavery, both with the dictates of humanity and religion, has been demonstrated, and is generally seen and acknowledged, to use their honest, earnest, and unwearied endeavors, to correct the errors of former times, and as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery

<sup>1</sup>Minutes, 1818, 688.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 691.





throughout Christendom, and if possible throughout the world."<sup>3</sup>

In speaking more particularly of the previous attitude of the Presbyterian church, the members of the Assembly "rejoice that the church to which we belong commenced, as early as any other in this country, the good work of endeavoring to put an end to slavery, and that in the same manner many of its members have ever since been, and now are, among the most active, vigorous, and efficient labourers. We do, indeed, tenderly sympathise with those portions of our church and our country...where the number of slaves, their ignorance, and their vicious habits generally, render an immediate and universal emancipation inconsistent, alike, with the safety and happiness of the master and the slave. - At the same time, we earnestly exhort them to continue, and, if possible, to increase their exertions to effect a total abolition of slavery. - We exhort them to suffer no greater delay to take place in this most interesting concern, than a regard to the public welfare truly and indispensably demands."<sup>4</sup>

In regard to emancipation, the Assembly took the position that "as our country has inflicted a most grievous injury on the unhappy Africans, by bringing them into slavery, we cannot, indeed, urge that we should add a second injury to the first, by emancipating them in such a manner as that they will be likely to destroy themselves or others. But we do think, that our country ought to be governed in this matter, by no other consideration than an honest and impartial regard to the happiness

<sup>3</sup>Minutes, 1818, 691.

<sup>4</sup>ibid, 593.



of the injured party; uninfluenced by the expense or inconvenience which such a regard may involve. We therefore warn all who belong to our denomination of christians, against unduly extending this plea of necessity; against making it a cover for the love and practice of slavery, or a pretence for not using efforts that are lawful and practicable, to extinguish the evil. And we, at the same time, exhort others to forbear harsh censures, and uncharitable reflections on their brethren, who unhappily live among slaves, whom they cannot immediately set free; but who, at the same time, are really using all their influence, and all their endeavors, to bring them into a state of freedom, as soon as a door for it can be safely opened."<sup>5</sup>

After these general expressions of sentiment, the deliverance proceeds with certain specific recommendations. In the first place, all church members are asked to patronize and to encourage the American Colonization Society, which had recently been organized, primarily for the purpose of furthering the settlement of free people of color on the west coast of Africa.<sup>6</sup> It is also strongly recommended that all members "not only permit, but facilitate and encourage the instruction of their slaves, in the principles and duties of the christian religion." This may be done by granting them liberty to attend the preaching of the gospel, by favoring their instruction in Sabbath Schools, and by "giving them all other proper advantages for ac-

<sup>5</sup>Minutes, 1818, 693-694.

<sup>6</sup>See McMaster, History of People of the United States, IV, 558ff., for an account of the origin and the organization of this society. Throughout its history it was warmly supported by the Presbyterian church. It began its existence officially on January 1, 1817.





quiring the knowledge of their duty both to God and man."<sup>7</sup> And finally, it is enjoined upon all lower church judicatories to discountenance and to prevent, as far as possible, all cruelty of every kind in the treatment of slaves, but especially that of separating families by forced sale. Any manifest violation or disregard of this injunction is to be considered as just cause for the discipline and censures of the church; and if the offender be a christian professor, he ought to be suspended from all the privileges of the church "till he repent and make all the reparation in his power to the injured party."<sup>8</sup>

After the adoption of this complete and comprehensive document, marking, as it did, the climax of almost a half-century of discussion and consideration, the Assembly took no further direct action of importance on slavery for more than a decade. Memorials, petitions, and overtures on various phases of the slavery issue were, it is true, presented from time to time; but they were all deemed sufficiently answerable by a mere reference to some previous deliverance on the subject. The lower judicatories also maintained, for the most part, a dignified silence. It was a period which in many respects resembled the lull before the storm; for with the beginning of the abolition agitation in the early thirties the church was to be engulfed in the very midst of the controversial maelstrom. But for the present all was comparatively serene and quiet, albeit rather ominous.

<sup>7</sup>Minutes, 1818, 695.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 695. The full text of this whole deliverance is quoted in Thompson, Presbyterians, Vol. VI in the American Church History Series, 364-368.





ly so.

There was one phase of the general negro problem, however, in which the General Assembly manifested a considerable degree of interest. This was the Colonization Society. As early as 1817, only a few months after its organization, this fact was commented upon with pleasure and satisfaction.<sup>9</sup> In the following year, and again in 1819, the Society was favorably mentioned on the floor of the Assembly.<sup>10</sup> In 1825 it was resolved to recommend to all churches that a collection be taken up annually on the Fourth of July for the benefit of the Colonization Society, and that the colonization of the free blacks on the west coast of Africa should be encouraged in every way.<sup>11</sup> In the "Narrative on the State of Religion" for this same year we find the statement that "the millions of this unhappy people in our country, from their singular condition as brought to the gospel by a peculiar providence, constitute at home a mission field of infinite importance and of a most inviting character. No more honored name can be conferred on a minister of Jesus Christ than that of Apostle to the American slaves; and no service can be more pleasing to the God of heaven or more useful to our beloved country than that which this title designates."<sup>12</sup> Again in 1826, as well as in rapid succession in 1831, 1832, and 1833, similar sentiments were expressed.<sup>13</sup> The secret of this enthusiastic and unqualified support of the Colonization Society seems to have been found in the fact that this organization offered the most practicable method of putting into actual practice the

<sup>9</sup>Minutes, 1817, 651.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 1818, 673; 1819, 710. As late as 1853, the New School Assemblies warmly recommended the support and recognition of the colony of Liberia. Minutes, New School, 1853, 329.



church's doctrine that the negroes should be properly trained before being emancipated.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the Society found a valuable ally; and the church felt that it was doing something very tangible to help solve the negro problem.

<sup>11</sup>Minutes, 1825, 154.

<sup>12</sup>Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, II, 242. These narratives were appended to the minutes of each year in the form of a report.

<sup>13</sup>Minutes, 1826, 180; 1831, 332; 1832, 365; 1833, 411.

<sup>14</sup>In addition to this hearty support of the Colonization Society, the church throughout its history was greatly interested in the religious instruction of the negroes. Both black and white men were commissioned to serve as missionaries or itinerant ministers amongst the slaves and free negroes; and often these crude, but sincere emissaries of the gospel performed valuable services. We find this work mentioned in the minutes of the Assemblies of 1801, 1807, 1817, and 1825, as well as in the minutes of the old School Assemblies of 1839, 1843, 1844, 1845, 1847, 1849, and 1853. The New School, after the division in 1837, also kept up a similar work. See Baird, S.G., Collection of Acts, Deliverances, and Testimony, for further details on this subject.





#### Chapter IV. - Abolitionism and the Church

During the half-decade extending from 1830 to 1835 the attitude of the Presbyterian church, - in common with that of other religious bodies and of the country in general, - towards the institution of slavery underwent a radical change. The causes of this conversion were numerous and complicated. Chief among them were the ever-present Southern dread of a servile insurrection, which had been resuscitated after a period of dormancy by the fiasco of Denmark Vesey at Charleston in 1820, had been aggravated by the publication and widespread distribution of "Walker's Appeal" in 1829, and had been fanned to a white heat by the Nat Turner insurrection at Southampton, Virginia, in 1831, in which sixty-one whites had been massacred;<sup>1</sup> the steadily increasing profitableness of the domestic slave-trade, which had reached tremendous proportions;<sup>2</sup> and the growth

<sup>1</sup>Herbert, Abolition Crusade, 59; May, Recollections, 129; Bacon, History of American Christianity, American Church History Series, XIII, 279ff. Throughout the century of Southern history which preceded the Civil War, this spectral, premonitory fear of a bloody uprising of the negroes loomed large in the minds of the slaveholders, and every possible means was employed to prevent it. Nevertheless, small outbreaks were not infrequent. Denmark Vesey was a free negro who in 1820 planned an elaborate uprising of the blacks at Charleston. He meant to massacre the whites, seize the shipping in the harbor, and, if hard pressed, to sail away to the West Indies. But one of his accomplices turned state's evidence, and Vesey, with 34 others, was seized, tried, and hanged. David Walker was an intelligent colored man of Boston who had travelled widely and knew the conditions of the negroes. He formed a determination to aid them by infusing into them his own spirit of vigorous rebellion against negro oppression; and in 1829 he published his "Appeal to the coloured citizens of the world, in particular and very expressly to those of the United States." It was a rather inflammatory work of eighty octavo pages, and was widely scattered amongst all negroes who could read. The insurrection at Southampton led by Nat Turner, a negro who was probably insane, is too well-known to require further explanation. See Hart, Slavery and



of the new spirit of dynamic, aggressive abolitionism whose advent was signalized by the publication of the "Liberator."<sup>5</sup>

But of these three main causes only the last could be attacked by the South openly and frankly, without danger of having a strong assault act as a boomerang. Therefore the full pressure of Southern opinion was brought to bear upon the "Liberator" and its advocates. Upon the ground that the circulation of the abolition ideas would incite the slaves to a bloody insurrection, every possible means of crushing the paper was attempted. Bitter invectives and opprobrious epithets were used with the utmost abandon; and the North was, by turns, peremptorily commanded and tearfully besought to suppress the agitation. And the North, although at first it did not share the frantically antagonistic attitude of its Southern neighbors, soon yielded to the pressure, and joined the opponents of abolition. For the Northern leaders did not dare to antagonize the South too

Abolition, 217-220, for further details.

<sup>2</sup>The "Virginia Times" in 1836 published an estimate fixing the number of slaves exported from Virginia in that year alone at 40,000. At an average price of \$600 per head, the total value would be \$24,000,000. In addition, 80,000 slaves were taken out by owners who moved to other states. Although Virginia was the principal slave-exporting state, other border states were also engaged in the practice. The slaves were bought for use on the great plantations of the Southernmost tier of states, constituting the main part of the black belt. Thomas Jefferson Randolph stated on the floor of the Virginia Legislature in 1832 that Virginia had been converted into "one grand menagerie, where men are reared for the market like oxen for the snambles." Smith, Political History of Slavery, I, 3. Figures quoted from Niles's Register, II, 83. See Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 123-130; and Olmsted, Seaboard Slave States, I, 60ff., and 314ff., for description of this domestic slave-trade.

<sup>3</sup>Other causes of this change may be found in the nullification struggle in South Carolina, the emancipation of slaves in the British possessions, and the publication, in 1835, of Dr. Channing's highly influential "Essay on Slavery."





vitally. The political parties needed the Southern vote, the large commercial houses wanted the Southern trade, and the churches desired the adhesion of their Southern coreligionists. Therefore we find that during these years the Presbyterian church, both South and North, yielded to the popular clamor and became a firm opponent of abolitionism; and by reason of this very fact it soon began to assume also a more lenient and conciliatory and apologetic attitude towards the "peculiar institution" which the abolitionists were attacking.

This new, aggressive type of abolitionism which was championed by Garrison and his cohorts was the successor to what may be termed, in contradistinction, the old abolition doctrine. This latter was a much more gentle and harmless prototype of its active and vituperative offspring. In many respects it was simply a continuation of the marked antislavery sentiment of the Revolutionary period, which had managed to survive, in a form more and more diluted by toleration of the institution, down to 1830. While it deprecated the existence of slavery and hoped for its eventual destruction, it was very discreet and only passively and vaguely inimical in its expressions and proposals, and was therefore neither potentially dangerous nor actually very harmful to the continuance of the practice. Although it would be highly unjust to say that it was hypocritical, it was certainly not greatly feared by the slave power. This condition probably goes far in explaining the fact that the stronghold of this old abolition during the years immediately preceding 1830 was actually in the South itself. For of the one hundred and one antislavery societies in the United States in 1826, more than





seventy-five percent were situated in the South.<sup>4</sup>

One of the last and most significant illustrations of this old spirit of the South, which freely admitted the evils of slavery and sincerely wished it away from the land, even though it could perceive no feasible method of attaining this end, is found in a debate of the Virginia Legislature which occurred in 1832, several months after the Nat Turner uprising. During the course of this discussion, speaker after speaker asserted in the most unequivocal terms that slavery was a curse to the South, that it produced effects, both direct and indirect, which were unmistakably evil, and that its extinction would prove an unalloyed blessing. The decided tone of the statements may be conveyed by a few quotations. Thus Mr. Moore, of Rockbridge, in speaking of the effects upon the white population exclusively, said: "I think that slavery as it exists among us, may be regarded as the heaviest calamity which has ever befallen any portion of the human race." Mr. Chandler, of Norfolk County, stated that "it is admitted by all who have addressed this House, that slavery is a curse, and an increasing one." This apparent unanimity of opinion was further emphasized by Mr. Powell, who could scarcely persuade himself "that there is a solitary gentleman in this House who will not readily admit that slavery is an evil, and that its removal, if practicable, is a consummation most de-

<sup>4</sup>Christian Advocate, 1826, 93. Quoted by Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 523. Of these, forty-one were in North Carolina, twenty-three in Tennessee, six in Kentucky, and a considerable number in Virginia. It will thus be seen that these four states practically monopolized the organized anti-slavery sentiment of the country. More than forty of these societies, however, represented a sort of mushroom growth; for they had been organized by Benjamin Lundy during the two preceding years.



voutly to be wished. I have not heard, nor do I expect to hear, a voice raised in this Hall to the contrary." And finally, James McDowell went so far as to assert that "if I am to judge from the tone of our debate, from the concessions on all hands expressed, there is not a man in this body - not one, perhaps, who is even represented here - who would not have thanked the generations that have gone before us, if, acting as public men, they had brought this bondage to a close - who would not have thanked them, if, acting as private men, on private notions, they had relinquished the property which their mistaken kindness has devolved upon us."<sup>5</sup>

Garrisonian abolitionism, which was largely responsible for the passing of this attitude, and which in a very short time drew down upon itself the utmost wrath of a bitterly denunciatory and firmly united South, was foreshadowed by several precursors during the transition decade of the twenties. Whether by chance or otherwise, all of these forerunners were direct representatives of the church; and they were distinguished from other contemporary antislavery writers by a more firm and decided condemnation of the practice, a smaller degree of apology and euphemism, and a greater insistence upon translating words into action. The work of these men, - three in number, - though not intrinsically of any great importance, was still significant of what was to come. As early as 1816 Rev. George Bourne, the first of the trio, published a work with the suggestive title, "The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable." He was followed in 1824

<sup>5</sup> See Goodloe, Southern Platform, 43-50, for these and other extracts from these debates. The quotations are made from the reports published in the "Richmond Inquirer."





by Rev. James Duncan, who was the author of "A Treatise on Slavery, in which is shown forth the Evil of Slave-Holding, both from the Light of Nature and Divine Revelation."<sup>6</sup> Two years later Rev. John Rankin gave to the world a series of thirteen letters written to his brother Thomas, a slaveholding merchant of Middlebrook, Virginia. In these letters the system of slavery was attacked in unmistakable terms, and it was stated that the safety of the government and the happiness of its subjects depended on the extermination of the practice.<sup>7</sup>

The full fruition of these seeds of unqualified antagonism to slavery, which took place in the form of the new abolitionism, led to a violent revulsion and virulent intensification of feeling at the South on the slavery issue. Reason and thoughtful consideration gave way to prejudice and passion. Everywhere there was manifested the most rabid opposition to the abolitionists and an insistent demand for the suppression of their propaganda at any cost. There were frequent riots and per-

<sup>6</sup>Siebert, Underground Railroad, 303-306.

<sup>7</sup>This Rev. John Rankin forms one of the most picturesque figures in the whole history of Presbyterian antislavery agitation. After having obtained an actual first-hand acquaintance with slavery during a pastorate in Carlisle, Kentucky, he moved to Ripley, Ohio, in 1821, where for forty-four years, as pastor of the Presbyterian church, he was a tower of strength to the anti-slavery cause. In 1828 he established himself in a house which crowned the top of a hill overlooking the Ohio River, and for three decades the rays shining from the windows of this home were used by fugitive slaves as beacon-lights to guide them across the river at night. Largely through his influence, the presbytery of Chillicothe, embracing four or five counties in south central Ohio, became one of the greatest antislavery strongholds in the church. It was a sort of center for Presbyterian ministers who had left the South because of opposition to slavery. Besides Rankin himself, other men who fitted into this category were James Gilleland, Jesse Lockhart, Robert Dobbins, Samuel Crothers, Hugh S. Fullerton, and William Dickey. For this reason, probably, the Chillicothe presbytery was one of the most persistent antislavery petitioners of the General Assembly. Year after year we find in the minutes of the Assembly



secutions and disturbances of all sorts. Persons who were suspected of cherishing abolition sentiments were assaulted, whipped, tarred and feathered, and insulted in every way.<sup>8</sup> In less extreme cases social ostracism was employed. The very name abolitionist was anathematized. Books, magazines, newspapers, legislatures, schools, pulpits, and all other organs of public opinion - all teemed with intolerant and denunciatory language.

And in this general program of intense and unbridled feeling and expression the Presbyterian ministers and the church bodies of the South were by no means the most backward. On the other hand, in common with those of other denominations, they were very often found in the very vanguard of the antiabolition forces. During the summer of 1835 a series of meetings was held throughout the South for the purpose of exciting popular feeling against the abolitionists; and almost without exception the clergy took a prominent part in these proceedings. At Charleston "the clergy of all denominations attended" such a meeting "in a body, lending their sanction to the proceedings, and adding by their presence to the impressive character of the scene."<sup>9</sup> At

that "an overture was presented from Chillicothe presbytery, praying the Assembly "to take some action or other in opposition to slavery. Siebert, *Underground Railroad*, 31-32; Howe, *History of Presbyterian church in South Carolina*, 635.

<sup>8</sup>As an illustration of this treatment, the case of Rev. A. W. Kitchell may be mentioned. Kitchell was a Presbyterian minister at Millborough, Georgia, who in June, 1836, was tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail, merely on suspicion that he was an abolitionist. Harris, *History of Negro Slavery in Illinois*, 65. Thompson, *Presbyterians*, 122, mentions another very similar case. The literature of the time is filled with other instances. One of the most notorious cases of whipping was that of Amos Dresser, at Nashville, Tennessee, on July 18, 1835. Dresser was a student at Lane Seminary who was selling Bibles in order to procure funds to continue his theological studies. At Nashville he was seized by a Committee of Vigilance composed of sixty-two members - of whom twenty-seven were church-members, including seven Presbyterian elders - and tried on the charge of having abolition documents in his possession. After a trial of several hours, he was





a meeting held at Clinton, Mississippi, it was resolved "that the clergy of the State of Mississippi be hereby recommended at once to take a stand upon this subject, and that their further silence in relation thereto, at this crisis, will, in our opinion, be subject to serious censure."<sup>10</sup> Seemingly in answer to such demands, the clergy of Richmond, Virginia, assembled on July 29, 1835, and resolved unanimously "that the suspicions which have prevailed to a considerable extent against ministers of the gospel and professors of religion in the State of Virginia, as identified with abolitionists, are wholly unmerited - believing as we do, from extensive acquaintance with our churches and brethern, that they are unanimous in opposing the pernicious schemes of abolitionists."<sup>11</sup>

Nor were the expressions of individual ministers less radical and decided. Thus Dr. Witherspoon, of South Carolina, in a letter written to Lyman Beecher during the summer of 1836, said: "Abolitionism leads to murder, rapine, and every vile crime that an enthusiastic ignorant slave could commit, and therefore I abhor Abolitionism, and detest the Abolitionist."<sup>12</sup> The same minister, in writing to the editor of the "Emancipator," said further: "When the tardy process of the law is too long in redressing our grievances, we of the South have adopted the summary stripped and given many lashes with a cowhide, although there was no law to cover the offence. See his own account of the affair in a little pamphlet called the "Narrative of Amos Dresser"; also Birney, American churches, 7ff.

<sup>9</sup>Birney, American churches, 9.  
<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 8.  
<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 9.  
<sup>12</sup>Beecher, Autobiography, II, 428.





remedy of Judge Lynch - and really think it one of the most wholesome and salutary remedies for the malady of northern fanaticism that can be applied, and no doubt my worthy friend, the editor of the Emancipator and Human Rights, would feel the better of its enforcement....Let your emissaries dare venture to cross the Potomac, and I cannot promise you that their fate will be less than Haman's. Then beware how you goad an insulted, but magnanimous people to deeds of desperation."<sup>13</sup> In July, 1835, the Rev. William S. Plummer, of Richmond, felt that "this is the most meddlesome, impudent, reckless, fierce, and wicked excitement I ever saw. If abolitionists will set the country in a blaze, it is but fair that they should receive the first warming of the fire. Let them understand that they will be caught if they come among us."<sup>14</sup> Still more radical sentiments were expressed in the same year by Rev. R. N. Anderson, who gave warning in a letter that "at the approaching stated meeting of the Presbytery, I design to offer a preamble and string of resolutions on the subject of the treasonable and abominably wicked interference of the Northern and Eastern fanatics with our political and civil rights, our property, and our domestic concerns....If there be any stray goat of a minister among you, tainted with the bloodhound principles of abolitionism, let him be ferreted out, silenced, excommunicated, and left to the public to dispose of in other respects."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 411; Birney, American churches, 35.

<sup>14</sup>Birney, American churches, 35; Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 411.

<sup>15</sup>The presbytery referred to was Hanover presbytery, in Virginia. There is no evidence to show whether or not the proposed resolutions were actually offered. Other instances of similar expressions on the part of Southern clergymen could be multi-



Since these were the sentiments of the church members and of the individual ministers, it is by no means surprising to find the same views reflected in the official utterances of the various ecclesiastical judicatories. The Harmony presbytery of South Carolina, for instance, adopted an interesting resolution which affirmed that "slavery has existed from the days of those good old slavenholders and patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob... and does now exist;...and whosoever has a conscience too tender to recognize this relation as lawful, is 'righteous overmuch', is 'wise above what is written', and has sacrificed his Christian liberty of conscience."<sup>16</sup>

The synod of Virginia stated that "the publications and proceedings of certain organized associations commonly called antislavery, or abolition societies, have greatly disturbed the peace of the church;" and thereupon resolved that "we consider the dogma fiercely promulgated by said associations...as directly and palpably contrary to the plainest principles of common sense and common humanity, and to the clearest authority of the word of God."<sup>17</sup> Criticisms of the General Assembly were not infrequent, as in the case of the Presbyterian congregation at Petersburg, Virginia, which in a resolution of November 16, 1838, attacked the action of the Assembly in 1818, and insisted "that as the Great Head of the church has recognized the relation of master and slave, we conscientiously believe that

plied indefinitely. See Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 411ff.; and Birney, American churches, 27, 33ff. Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 157, asserts that "the southern clergymen almost without exception defended the system," and that Southern leaders of all kinds solidly supported slavery. See also Garrisons, Garrison, II, 138; and Johnson, Garrison, 247.

<sup>16</sup> Barnes, Inquiry Into Scriptural Views of Slavery, 30; Thompson, Presbyterians, 133.

<sup>17</sup> Barnes, Inquiry Into Scriptural Views of Slavery, 32; Thompson, Presbyterians, 134.





slavery is not a sin against God as declared by the General Assembly; and that there is no tyranny more oppressive than that which is sometimes sanctioned by the operation of ecclesiastical law."<sup>18</sup>

Such, then, was the attitude towards abolitionism which the South had assumed by the summer of 1835 - bitterly hostile, vindictive, vituperative, and intolerant. And the vast majority of the Presbyterians in the Southern states were in full sympathy with this sentiment.<sup>19</sup> The Northern churches, too, influenced largely by their Southern members, were by this time exhibiting a decided hostility to the abolitionists; and by so doing were walking arm in arm with the popular demand. The position of the North was in many respects a rather softened afterglow, a somewhat diluted counterpart, of that of the South. Not nearly so virulent or rabid, on the whole, it nevertheless made itself felt in an infinite variety of ways.

<sup>18</sup>Barnes, Inquiry Into Scriptural Views of Slavery, 32. These various resolutions are thoroughly typical of Southern ecclesiastical opinion of the period, which rallied to the support of slavery with surprising alacrity and unanimity. Hart, on page 136 of his Slavery and Abolition, gives an interesting summary of the change in attitude throughout the South, especially in religious circles. He says: "Down to 1830...churches, the missionary societies, and individuals urged moderate treatment. Then a different spirit manifested itself: the denunciation of slavery slackened; the efforts at amelioration hesitated, and eventually ceased; the former excuses and pleas for slavery changed to justification, then to positive praise of slavery, then to a state of mind in which the admission that any part of its 'Peculiar Institution' ought to be reformed was regarded as disloyal to the south."

<sup>19</sup>The single important exception to this statement occurred in the case of the border states, where opinion was pretty generally divided. The synod of Kentucky may be taken as an illustration. In 1833 an overture was introduced, asking the synod to declare that slavery was a great moral evil. After a spirited discussion, which continued for two days, the whole subject was indefinitely postponed. It was upon this occasion that Robert J. Breckinridge left the meeting-house dramatically, declaring that "since God had forsaken the Synod of



One of the most annoying and vexatious, though certainly not the most dangerous, expressions of this growing hostility to abolitionists was that of social ostracism. There are repeated indications in the literature of the day that the most influential elements in the community, the persons of property and standing, the so-called "best families," were solidly and strongly opposed to abolition. To be an abolitionist was decidedly unfashionable: it was a social blunder of the first magnitude.<sup>20</sup> And those who placed themselves outside the pale were severely and unremittingly reminded of this fact by means of countless slights and petty insults. Thus when Harriet Martineau attended an antislavery meeting in Boston and made a brief address to the assembly she was given to understand that she had offended the best society of the metropolis.<sup>21</sup> And

Kentucky, Robert J. Breckinridge will forsake it too." The next year, however, the synod recanted, and condemned slavery as a source of degradation, ignorance, cruelty, and licentiousness, at the same time urging the gradual emancipation of the slave. A committee was appointed which in 1835 fearlessly recounted the evils of slavery and strongly advocated its gradual emancipation. This proposition, however, was in advance of public sentiment, and the synod took no formal action in the matter. But for many years this synod continued to be one of strongholds of the advocates of gradual emancipation. See Gillett, *History of Presbyterian Church*, 523, 524; Thompson, *Presbyterians*, 122; Smith, *Political History of Slavery*, I, 4-6; and Goodell, *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*, 152-153.

<sup>20</sup> Hart, *Slavery and Abolition*, 210, says that "in every part of this agitation the abolitionists stood for a despised cause. The few men like Wendell Phillips, Edmund Quincy, and Thomas W. Higginson, who came out of the agreeable circle of New England aristocracy, were made to feel that it was a choice between the slaves and the friends of their youth." Herbert, *Abolition Crusade*, 64, mentions the great mass-meeting held at Faneuil Hall, in Boston, on August 3, 1835, at which the "social, political, religious, and intellectual elite" of the city protested against abolitionism, and passed a series of resolutions strongly condemning the abolitionists. See also Johnson, *Garrison*, 71; and May, *Recollections*, 159.

<sup>21</sup> Hart, *Slavery and Abolition*, 210; May, *Recollections*, 159.





Theodore Parker was forced to write upon one occasion: "My life seems to me a complete failure socially; here I am as much an outcast from society as though I were a convicted pirate."<sup>22</sup>

The colleges of the North, too, were for the most part definitely hostile to abolition; and this was true of the theological seminaries no less than of the secular institutions. At practically all of the well-known schools one or more members of the faculty came out strongly in defense of slavery, seeking to justify it upon various grounds, usually by reference to the Bible.<sup>23</sup> While such radical apologists for slavery constituted, of course, only a small minority, the great body of their colleagues either supported them quietly or maintained a discreet silence. Very few came out openly in favor of the abolitionists. With such opinions prevailing among their instructors, it was but natural that a large percentage of the students should adopt the same attitude. In the case of the theological seminaries this feeling was still further intensified by the questionable orthodoxy of many of the abolitionists.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Hart, *Slavery and Abolition*, 210.

<sup>23</sup>A partial list of such cases would include Stuart of Andover, Alexander of Princeton, Fisk of Wilbraham, President Lord of Dartmouth, and Bishop Hopkins of Vermont. All of these men spoke and wrote widely on the subject. The Southern schools, of course, were practically unanimous in their justification of slavery, and consequent abuse of the abolitionists. See Johnson, *Garrison*, 48; Hart, *Slavery and Abolition*, 211; May, *Recollections*, 365; and Hopkins, *Scriptural View of Slavery*.

<sup>24</sup>Lane Seminary, located at Walnut Hills, Ohio, just outside of Cincinnati, constituted a notable exception to this condition. In February, 1834, after a very full and free discussion which was continued for eighteen evenings in the presence of President Lyman Beecher and other members of the faculty, the students decided by a large majority vote that "immediate emancipation from slavery was the right of every slave and the duty of every slaveholder," and that "the American Colonization Society and its scheme were not deserving of the approbation and aid of Christians." The institution had at that time about one hundred students, most of whom were over twenty-five years of age. They





One of the most powerful and inveterate opponents of the abolitionists was the press, both secular and religious. Many of the ecclesiastical journals of the day were openly and bitterly antagonistic to the abolition propaganda; while others simply ignored the whole issue as far as possible. The secular press was unreservedly hostile. A few publishers who really sympathized with the abolition ideas were afraid to print them, because to do so would entail a ruinous drop in the circulation of their papers.<sup>25</sup> Partly because of the feeling engendered by these periodicals and newspapers, but more as a result of the tenseness of the general situation, riots and violent outbreaks of various kinds were frequent between 1835 and 1840. Burnings, assaults upon the persons and property of abolitionists, and attacks upon antislavery meetings were the most prominent features

took a very active interest in the slavery question, organized antislavery societies, and carried on a considerable welfare work amongst the colored population of Cincinnati - conducting religious meetings, organizing Bible-classes, and giving instruction in elementary school subjects. During the summer of 1834, however, in the absence of most of the members of the faculty, the trustees, yielding apparently to the popular disapproval of the antislavery sentiments and actions of the students, ordered the dissolution of the antislavery and colonization societies, and ruled that no more public meetings or addresses might be held by the students without the consent of the faculty. The students thereupon rebelled, and withdrew in a body to Cummingsville. When Dr. Beecher returned in the fall, he secured a modification of the regulations; but the students refused to return, and many of them went to Oberlin, where a theological department was organized for them. The antislavery press bitterly attacked the seminary for infringing upon the freedom of speech; and the *Liberator* even called it a "Bastille of oppression - a spiritual Inquisition." These attacks, however, seem to have been unjustified, for the most part, as the policy pursued thereafter was at least as liberal as that of other similar institutions. See Beecher, *Autobiography*, II, 313-331, for a full description of this affair; also May, *Recollections*, 102ff.

<sup>25</sup> May, *Recollections*, 139; Johnson, *Garrison*, 158; *Garrison's Garrison*, I, 478. The Southern religious papers, of course, were unanimous in their attacks on abolitionism.



of these outbursts.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to all these other agencies, the church and the clergy were decidedly and definitely hostile to the Garrisonian program. In the vast majority of cases abolition speakers were not allowed to hold meetings on church property; and many ministers even refused to read notices of abolition meetings from their pulpits.<sup>27</sup> Johnson, in his life of Garrison, states that it was often almost impossible to find in the city of Boston a single clergyman of any standing who would even consent to open an anti-slavery meeting with prayer; and therefore it was often necessary to resort to the services of a negro minister from "nigger hill."<sup>28</sup> In July, 1837, the General Association of Massachusetts issued a pastoral letter to the churches under its care, in which the clergymen addressed were asked to prevent antislavery lecturers from speaking from their pulpits, and to warn their communicants against attending the meetings conducted by the Grimke sisters.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Instances of this kind were so common and well-known that it is deemed useless to enlarge upon this point. The murder of Elijah P. Lovejoy at Alton, the sacking of the home of Lewis Tappan in New York, and several assaults upon Garrison are perhaps the most widely known. See May, Recollections; Johnson, Garrison; Garrison's Garrison; Greeley, American Conflict, 123-126; Hart, Slavery and Abolition; Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, and any standard history of the period for countless other instances. Beecher, Autobiography, II, 430, gives an exciting account of a mob in Philadelphia in 1838.

<sup>27</sup>May, in his Recollections, mentions case after case in which he was refused the use of churches during a lecture tour in 1834. See pp. 129, 140, 153-155. Johnson, Garrison, 71, also dwells upon this fact, as well as McMaster, History of People of United States, VI, 471-472.

<sup>28</sup>Johnson, Garrison, 71. A venerable old negro minister known as Father Samuel Snowden, who was possessed of an exceedingly picturesque vocabulary and a voice of tremendous volume, seems to have been the favorite for such services.

<sup>29</sup>Angelina and Sarah Grimke, natives of the South, were at this time delivering a series of lectures throughout the North in opposition to slavery and in favor of greater freedom for women. They met with violent and sarcastic hostility from all quarters. Even Catherine Beecher, in an open letter, called







This was followed by an "Appeal of Clerical Abolitionists on Antislavery Measures," which appeared in the "New England Spectator" for August 2, 1837, over the signatures of five clergymen. In this document Garrison was attacked because of his "hasty, unsparing, almost ferocious denunciation" of a minister from the South who had been preaching in Boston, because of his abuse of ministers and Christians, who were not ready to unite with an antislavery society, and on several other similar counts.<sup>30</sup> Not one minister in one hundred, according to one writer, ever took a definite stand in opposition to slavery;<sup>31</sup> another author assures us that not one sermon in a thousand delivered at the North contained any allusion to the duties of Christians towards the colored population;<sup>32</sup> while "not a few" discourses preached in New England and the Middle States were in justification of slaveholding.<sup>33</sup>

It must not be concluded, however, that the Northern churches were solidly and unanimously hostile to abolition. In every denomination there was a very respectable minority which actively opposed slavery and labored for its destruction; and the ranks of the abolitionists were recruited largely from

the "Duty of American Females," addressed to Angelina Grimke, resolutely attacks the abolitionists and their methods. Garrison's Garrison, II, 133. - This document was composed by Rev. Nehemiah Adams, of Boston, who was later known as "Southside Adams," because he wrote a work entitled "A Southside View of Slavery" in which he justified the system, and embodied observations made during a brief journey through the South. See Hart's Contemporaries, IV, 65-68, for extracts from this work.

<sup>30</sup> There can be no doubt that much of the contemporary criticism of Garrison for his harsh and ultra-denunciatory methods and language was more than justified. This probably accounts for his lack of support from many persons who agreed with him in his general ideas concerning the evil of slavery, yet could not sanction his violently extreme methods. Garrison's, Garrison, II, 136-137; Thompson, Presbyterians, 132; Herbert, Abolition Crusade, 75.



church-members. Thus in a letter of November 17, 1837, Lewis Tappan states that the clergy, as such, "have come into the anti-slavery ranks ten to one compared with any other class of men;"<sup>34</sup> and one author asserts that "up to 1840 it was probably true that ninety-nine abolitionists out of one hundred were church-members and that the clergy as a body contained more abolitionists than any other class in proportion to their number."<sup>35</sup> May also avers that the antislavery lecturers, agents, and other workers included a greater percentage of ministers than of representatives of any other profession.<sup>36</sup>

And yet, in spite of these facts, the number of the abolitionists, in comparison with that of the orthodox church-members and clergy, was so pitiably small that it still remained perfectly true that the great weight of the churches was thrown into the scales against abolition.<sup>37</sup> On the whole, therefore, the assertion of William Joy that "it is no libel on the great body of our Northern clergy to say that, in regard to the wrongs of the colored people, instead of performing the part of the good Samaritan, their highest merit consists in following the example of the priest and Levite in passing by on the other side

<sup>31</sup> May, Recollections, 365.

<sup>32</sup> Johnson, Garrison, 249. Quoted from the Honorable William Joy, an Episcopalian layman.

<sup>33</sup> May, Recollections, 136.

<sup>34</sup> Birney, James G. Birney and His Times, 296.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>36</sup> May, Recollections, 332. Birney, American churches, 49, and Johnson, Garrison, 246, also state that in practically all denominations there were earnest and sincere advocates of abolition.

<sup>37</sup> See Beecher, Autobiography, II, 345, 426; May, Recollections, II, 329-333; Johnson, Garrison, 247-249; and Birney, American churches, 33-35, for views and opinions on abolition expressed by representative Presbyterian clergymen. Johnson, Garrison, 159-160, gives an excellent summary of the standard arguments against abolition which were employed by the orthodox clergy and church-members.





without inflicting new injuries on their wounded brother," seems a very just and merited one.<sup>38</sup>

The gap between the abolitionists and the churches was still further widened by the attacks upon the Colonization Society made by the former, and by the charges of infidelity which were persistently reiterated by the latter.<sup>39</sup> Garrison and his followers believed that the Colonization Society was largely a device of the slaveholders to rid themselves of the free negroes, who constituted a disturbing and anomalous element in every slave community;<sup>40</sup> while the church insisted upon continuing its support of the Society, and asserted that the abolitionists were hopelessly permeated with infidelity. So that by the latter half of the decade of the thirties the lines were very clearly drawn, and a rather definitely antagonistic relationship existed between the abolitionist and the orthodox Presbyterian church-member.

<sup>38</sup>Quoted in Johnson, Garrison, 249.

<sup>39</sup>This supposed infidelity of the abolitionists was one of the most curious outgrowths of the whole abolition movement. The followers of Garrison claimed that they had turned first of all to the churches for assistance in their antislavery propaganda, but had met only rebuffs and discouragement, or indifference; as in the case of Garrison himself, who upon appealing to Lyman Beecher for aid in 1850 was met by the response that he had "too many irons in the fire already." Garrisons, Garrison, I, 215; Johnson, Garrison, 44. This treatment the abolitionists claimed, disappointed them greatly, and forced them to withdraw from active participation in church affairs. But they always drew a careful distinction between the church and the Bible, and asserted that while they were compelled to attack the former, their reverence for and complete acceptance of the latter had never diminished. On the whole, it seems that the frequently reiterated charge of infidelity was unjustified and ill-founded. See Johnson, Garrison, 49, 248; May, Recollections, 333; and Greeley, American Conflict, 121.

<sup>40</sup>May, Recollections, 18; Johnson, Garrison, 249.





## Chapter V. - The Great Schism

As a fitting climax to the years of strife and unrest which had elapsed since the beginning of the decade, the Presbyterian church in 1837 and 1838 was rent almost exactly in twain. One party, known as the Old School, retained approximately five-ninths of the ministry and membership of the former complete organization; while the other, denominated the New School, contented itself with the remaining four-ninths.<sup>1</sup> Each of these branches affected to consider itself the one and only true church, exhibiting officially a total disregard of the existence of the other, and thus tacitly implying that the latter was an unconstitutional and schismatical offshoot.<sup>2</sup> It has been very generally supposed that the division was caused purely by a difference of belief on doctrinal and ecclesiastical points; but the best evidence tends to prove that the slavery issue also formed a very real factor in the separation, even though it operated indirectly. Although it is exceedingly difficult to form any just estimate of the exact influence of this element in the situation, it cannot be doubted that it was actually present in the minds and councils of many of the men who par-

<sup>1</sup>Figures taken from Thompson, Presbyterians, 120.

<sup>2</sup>The minutes of both Assemblies bore the identical title, "Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church in the United States of America," and there was nothing to indicate officially whether they represented the New or the Old School. A very marked general similarity in regard to form, period covered, subject-matter, style, etc., rendered the possibility of confusion still greater. Perhaps the least troublesome method of identifying any particular volume of minutes consisted of searching for the names of men who were known to be either Old or New School adherents.



ticipated in the cleavage proceedings.<sup>3</sup> A consideration of the circumstances which led up to the actual division renders the truth of this assertion apparent.

The period immediately preceding the division of 1838 was one of extensive and hotly contested doctrinal controversy. As early as 1829 Albert Barnes, then only recently graduated from Princeton, delivered a sermon of such doubtful orthodoxy that he was tried before three separate judicatories within two years.<sup>4</sup> Following his acquittal, several other ministers were compelled to defend themselves against the charge of harboring unorthodox beliefs. Perhaps the most prominent of these so-called radicals were Lyman Beecher, Edward Beecher and George Duffield, all of whom were subjected to trials which attracted a large amount of attention in church circles.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the church a spirit of controversial eagerness and philosophical quibbling over fine points of phraseology in the exposition of doctrine was rampant. One surviving member of a former gener-

<sup>3</sup>Thompson, Presbyterians, 122-123, is inclined to believe that the slavery issue was a rather unimportant element in the situation although he does not deny its existence. Gillett, however, in his History of Presbyterian church, II, 488ff., cites a large mass of evidence in support of the contention that slavery was a highly decisive factor throughout the division proceedings. Facts gleaned from other authors furnish considerable additional evidence in support of Gillett's viewpoint. See especially Von Holst, Con. and Political History of United States, II, 544.

<sup>4</sup>This sermon, on the "Way of Salvation," was delivered at Morristown, New Jersey. In 1830, because of the sentiments expressed therein, a determined effort was made to prevent the installation of Barnes as the pastor of the First Presbyterian church of Philadelphia. At a first trial before the second presbytery of Philadelphia he was acquitted of doctrinal unsoundness; but the synod of Philadelphia ordered a rehearing, at which the decision was reversed. The case then came before the General Assembly of 1831, which finally acquitted him. Thompson, Presbyterians, 105-106.

<sup>5</sup>See Thompson, Presbyterians, 108-109, for an account of these and other similar cases.





ation of ministers bemoaned the fact that "everything is cold and dead except the spirit of controversy."<sup>6</sup> The growing estrangement between the Congregational and Presbyterian elements in the church, which had been consolidated by the Plan of Union in 1801, was partly responsible for, and at the same time further intensified this feeling.<sup>7</sup>

The first definite expression of the crystallization of conservative Old School sentiment occurred in the form of the so-called "Western Memorial," a paper drawn up and presented to the General Assembly of 1834 largely through the influence of Dr. Wilson, of Cincinnati. This document was signed by eighteen ministers and ninety-nine elders, who deprecated the widespread existence of doctrinal error throughout the Presbyterian church, denounced the Plan of Union as impolitic and unconstitutional, attacked the prevailing laxity in the examination of candidates for ordination and pointed out many specific errors of doctrine. The Assembly, however, refused to sanction this memorial.<sup>8</sup> Thereupon the memorialists drew up a second paper, known as the "Act and Testimony," in which they reflected and emphasized their former charges and attitude, appealed to the church for support in ruling out heresies and maintaining an unimpaired orthodoxy, and invited all those favoring this position to attend a special convention

<sup>6</sup>The reverend Dr. John H. Rice, who had been for many years a prominent representative of the Presbyterian pulpit in the South. This statement was made during a visit to New York in 1830. Thompson, Presbyterians, 107.

<sup>7</sup>This plan, often termed the "Presbygational system," made the various constituent parts of the two systems practically interchangeable. It was adopted by joint action of the General Assembly and the Connecticut Association, and affected especially the churches of western New York and of other parts of the West which were settled in part by New England stock. See Thompson, Presbyterians, 72, for its effect on the controversies of this period.



to be held at Pittsburg, just before the regular Assembly meeting there in 1835, for the purpose of deliberating upon and adopting such measures as should seem "best suited to restore the prostrated standards." After considerable agitation throughout the church, this special convention convened at the time set, aired its grievances, and prepared to carry on the fight for orthodoxy in a definite and organized manner.<sup>9</sup>

The struggle was now transferred to the floor of the General Assembly of 1835. Besides the general subject of church orthodoxy, the other important factors which were to play a decisive part in the approaching division had become by this time fairly well defined, and presented themselves for consideration with relentless insistence. They were: the abrogation of the Plan of Union because of its alleged unconstitutionality, and the consequent implied excising of the Congregational elements in the church; the errors in doctrine imputed to Albert Barnes, Lyman Beecher, and other men of less prominence; the transaction of the collateral business of the church<sup>10</sup> by means of ecclesiastical boards or through voluntary organizations operating in conjunction with the church; and the attitude to be assumed towards slavery. All of these matters except the last were what may be termed party issues: i.e., the Old School men, on the whole, favored doctrinal soundness, abrogation, the conviction of liber-

<sup>8</sup>Gillett, History of Presbyterian church in United States, II, 483; Thompson, Presbyterians, 110.

<sup>9</sup>Thompson, Presbyterians, 111; Gillett, History of Presbyterian church in United States, II, 488-490. This second paper was signed by thirty-seven ministers and twenty-seven elders. The number of delegates who attended this special convention is not mentioned.

<sup>10</sup>Such as home and foreign missions, publication, etc.





als like Barnes and Beecher, and ecclesiastical boards; while the New School adherents, on the contrary, wanted a more liberal doctrine, opposed abrogation, supported the more radical doctrinaires, and desired voluntary associations. On the slavery question however the line of cleavage ran through both parties, rather than between them. The ensuing division, too, was very unequal, for the Old School faction contained considerably more than fifty per cent of the slavery advocates and apologists, while the New School possessed a decided majority of the antislavery delegates. Neither side, therefore, was decisively either proslavery or antislavery.<sup>11</sup>

The problem of the "peculiar institution" of the South was one of the first to come before the Assembly. On May 26, 1835, "overture No. 12, consisting of memorials and petitions from individuals and from two Presbyteries, praying the Assembly to take order on the subject of slavery," was taken up.<sup>12</sup> After being read, it was referred to a committee, which held it without action until June 8,<sup>15</sup> when a report was made in favor of postponing the whole subject. Elder Stewart, of Illinois, in a daring speech which was frequently interrupted by calls to order, delivered a stern indictment of the vacillating policy of the As-

<sup>11</sup>See Gillett, History of Presbyterian church, II, 503-522; and Thompson, Presbyterians, 102-128, for a description of the exceedingly complicated and difficult situation brought about by the intricate interaction of all these various forces.

<sup>12</sup>Minutes, 1835, 472.

<sup>13</sup>This device of holding an unpopular issue in committee until the last few days of the session, when there would be no time for adequate discussion, seems to have been employed very frequently. It was especially convenient in handling the slavery issue, and the Minutes afford abundant evidence of its use from time to time.





sembly and made a strong plea for more definite action in opposition to slavery. He declared that "in this church, a man may take a free-born child, force it away from its parents, to whom God gave it in charge, and sell it as a beast, or hold it in perpetual bondage, and not only escape corporal punishment, but still be esteemed an excellent Christian. Nay, even ministers of the Gospel, and Doctors of Divinity, may engage in this unholy traffic, and yet sustain their high and holy calling. Elders, ministers, and Doctors of Divinity are, with both hands, engaged in the practice!"<sup>14</sup> These sentiments were received, however, with marked hostility. After some discussion, it was decided to refer the whole question to a committee which was to report to the next Assembly. This committee consisted of Dr. Miller, Dr. Hoge, Mr. Witherspoon, Mr. Dickey, and Dr. Beman, of whom the first three were Southerners and slavery apologists.<sup>15</sup>

Before hearing this report, however, the Assembly of 1836 was called upon to settle another question of disputed orthodoxy. During the course of the preceding year Rev. Albert Barnes had been arraigned before the second presbytery of Philadelphia on the charge of doctrinal error. Although defeated in the presbytery, the prosecutor, Rev. George Junkin, appealed to the synod of Philadelphia, which upheld his indictment and suspended Barnes from his pulpit till he should retract. But this the suspended minister steadily refused to do; and as a result he was compelled to sit in his own church as a listener, waiting for the time when he could take an appeal to the General Assembly of

<sup>14</sup>Marsh, Writings and Speeches of Alvan Stewart on Slavery, 154; Garrison's, Garrison, I, 103; Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 153; Birney, American churches, 28.

<sup>15</sup>Minutes, 1835, 490.



1836. When the case finally came before this body, he was acquitted on the basis of fact, though the errors charged to him were condemned in thesis.<sup>16</sup>

With this preliminary matter cleared away, the Assembly settled down to a serious consideration of the work of the committee on slavery. The majority report, after stating that inasmuch as slavery was inseparably connected with the laws of many states, it would be improper for an ecclesiastical judicature to interfere, recommended "that the Assembly take no further order in relation to this subject." It was also affirmed that since there were many considerations connected with slavery regarding which great diversity of opinion and intensity of feeling existed in the churches represented in the Assembly, any definite action in this matter would tend to distract and to divide the churches so represented.<sup>17</sup>

The minority report, on the other hand, recommended the adoption of the following strongly antislavery resolutions: "That the buying, selling, or holding a human being as property, is in the sight of God a heinous sin, and ought to subject the doer of it to the censures of the church; that it is the duty of everyone, and especially of every Christian, who may be involved in this sin to free himself from its entanglements without

<sup>16</sup>Thompson, Presbyterians, 110-111. The chief significance of this affair lies in the fact that it served as a sort of straw vote, showing that there was a strong New School element which opposed ultra-conservatism and favored a considerable degree of liberalism in doctrine. The New School faction possessed a majority in this Assembly of 1836.

<sup>17</sup>Birney, American Churches, 28; Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 154. Dr. Witherspoon, a prominent slaveholding minister of South Carolina, who helped in drawing up this majority report, was elected moderator of this Assembly. Gillett, History of Presbyterian church, II, 524.





delay;...to plead the cause of the poor and needy by testifying against the principle and practice of slaveholding; to use his best endeavors to deliver the church of God from the evil; and to bring about the emancipation of the slaves in these United States, and throughout the world."<sup>18</sup>

At once indignant and alarmed at these radical proposals, the slaveholding delegates, forty-eight in number, met apart, and resolved "that if the General Assembly shall undertake to exercise authority on the subject of slavery, so as to make it an immorality, or shall in any way declare that Christians are criminal in holding slaves, a declaration shall be presented by the southern delegation, declining their jurisdiction in the case, and declaring our determination not to submit to such a decision!"<sup>19</sup> At a later adjourned meeting the southern delegates further declared that slavery was inseparably connected with the laws of many of the states, that it was recognized in both the Old and New Testaments as an existing relation, that it was nowhere condemned by the authority of God, and that the General Assembly had no authority to assume or exercise jurisdiction in regard to the existence of the institution.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 154; Birney, American Churches 29; Gillett, History of Presbyterian church, II, 525. This report was drawn up and presented by Mr. Dickey alone, the other four members of the committee concurring in the majority report.

<sup>19</sup>Birney, American Churches, 29.

<sup>20</sup>Birney, American Churches, 29. During the discussion of the slavery question at this time, a pamphlet containing a strong Bible argument in favor of slavery was issued for gratuitous circulation amongst the members of the Assembly. It was a reprint of an article, supposedly written by Professor Hodge, which had appeared in the "Princeton Repertory." The author strongly affirmed that there was nothing in the Bible which condemned slavery, and declared that "the assumption that slaveholding is, in itself, a crime, is not only an error, but it is an error fraught with evil consequences." See Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 155.



After an extended discussion which continued for several days, the whole question was finally settled by the adoption of the following judicious resolution: "Inasmuch as the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, in its preliminary and fundamental principles, declares that no Church Judicatory ought to pretend to make laws, to bind the conscience, in virtue of their own authority; and as the urgency of the business of the Assembly, and the shortness of the time during which they can continue in session, render it impossible to deliberate and decide judiciously on the subject of slavery in its relations to the church; therefore, resolved, that this whole subject be indefinitely postponed."<sup>21</sup>

The character of the slavery discussion in this Assembly led to widespread dissatisfaction, and demands for separation became more and more frequent and open, especially in the South. As early as 1832 the "Princeton Review" had recommended a significant plan of reorganization, whereby "the churches in the slaveholding states will be separated from those in the Northern states."<sup>22</sup> This suggestion met with little favor at that time, but now a considerable portion of the Southern Presbyterians took it up without hesitation. In speaking of the meeting of 1836, a correspondent of the "Southern Religious Telegraph" said in that paper: "I hope that such another Assembly will never meet but once again, and then only with full and delegated powers amicably to separate."<sup>23</sup> The presbytery of Concord, North Caro-

<sup>21</sup>Minutes, 1836, 272. The vote on this resolution, as given in the minutes, was as follows: yeas, 154; nays, 87; declined voting, 4.

<sup>22</sup>Beecher, Autobiography, II, 428.

<sup>23</sup>Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 525.





lina, resolved that "rather than surrender the truth, or perpetuate the present distracting agitation, we shall feel bound to submit to a division of the Church"; the presbytery of South Carolina stated that "the parties ought to separate;" the synod of Virginia said, "one thing which presses with peculiar force on the Presbyterian Church in the South is the spirit of abolition;" while the Charleston Union presbytery affirmed "that as the relation of master and slave is a civil institution, it is one on which the Church has no power to legislate."<sup>24</sup> And Dr. Witherspoon, in writing to Lyman Beecher, said: "Division I do most sincerely and deeply deplore; but if it must, as a dernier resort, come to this, I am strongly inclined to the opinion that Mason and Dixon's line must be the ridge. It needs but the lifting a finger to bring this to pass."<sup>25</sup>

This division sentiment found effective expression through a confidential committee of correspondence, which issued secret circulars and pamphlets in an effort to prepare the way for separation in 1837. A determined effort was made to keep these papers out of the public prints; and all transactions of the committee were carried on in a purely confidential way. Persons of influence were approached, and broad hints thrown out concerning the distinct probability of an imminent division of the Church on doctrinal questions. Shortly before the annual meeting of 1837, a special convention was held in Philadelphia which perfected arrangements for forcing a consideration of the subject of separation on the floor of the Assembly. The confidential committee declared

<sup>24</sup>Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 525. These statements show clearly that slavery was a very real consideration in the eyes of the authors.

<sup>25</sup>Beecher, Autobiography, II, 427.





at this time that "we cannot continue in the same body," and determined that "in some way or other, these men must be separated from us."<sup>26</sup>

Accordingly, when the General Assembly of 1837 met at Philadelphia late in May, a bitter attack was launched against the Plan of Union of 1801. It was loudly asserted that the Plan had been unconstitutional from the first, and that the Congregational elements which had been absorbed under its operation were unsound in doctrine; and the only proper remedy, it was further affirmed, consisted in excising the synods which were most seriously permeated with Congregationalism. After a long and heated discussion, accompanied by a great deal of Parliamentary maneuvering and a fine display of forensic ability,<sup>27</sup> this proposed remedy was applied, and it was voted to excise the synods of Utica, Genesee, Geneva, and Western Reserve, and the Third Philadelphia presbytery.<sup>28</sup> Thus at one stroke almost one-fifth of the entire membership of the church, including four synods, thirty presbyteries, and about sixty thousand communicants, was lopped off.<sup>29</sup> This radical and violent measure did not pass without meeting with strong and serious opposition, both within and without the walls of the Assembly; but when the actual vote came, its advocates were able to summon up a majority in its favor.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 495-496.

<sup>27</sup> Henry Clay pronounced the display of oratory on the floor of this Assembly finer than anything which had been heard in the National House of Representatives for a long time. Thompson, Presbyterians, 126.

<sup>28</sup> This excised territory was located largely in the western part of New York, and was populated principally by New England stock which quite naturally had strong Congregational leanings.

<sup>29</sup> Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church II, 517; Thompson, Presbyterians, 121; Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 155.

<sup>30</sup> See Thompson, Presbyterians, 118ff., for a good, concise description of the procedure in this Assembly. The excising acts were considered unconstitutional and unexpedient by many of the



By a strange and yet natural coincidence, the excinded territory contained a considerable percentage of the active antislavery sentiment of the church, as well as a large number of the most vigorous antislavery leaders. This was, of course, a very natural accompaniment of the New England stock and the Congregational background. Therefore, although there can be no doubt of the fact, it is extremely difficult to ascertain how large a part it played in the motives of the excinding party.<sup>31</sup>

But there are other evidences of the existence of slavery as a factor in the separation. Thus Dr. Gardiner Spring stated in 1839 that "the unhappy division of the Presbyterian church grew out of this opposition to the proceedings and designs of the Abolition Society, and, painful as it was, they were obliged to rend the church to avoid being engulfed in the sentiments, feelings, and schemes of abolitionists."<sup>32</sup> And Dr. Lyman Beecher said in conversation: "The South had generally stood neutral. They had opposed going to extremes in theology either way....But they got scared about abolition....John C. Calhoun was at the bottom of it. I know of his doing things - writing to ministers, and telling them to do this and do that. The South finally took the Old School side. It was a cruel thing - it was a cursed thing, and 'twas slavery that did it."<sup>33</sup> Robert J. Breckinridge openly declared in the Assembly of 1857 that it was the opinion of many

foremost Presbyterian leaders; and they were even deprecated by many who belonged to the excinding party on points of doctrine - men like Dr. Gardiner Spring of New York and Dr. Spencer of Brooklyn. See also Gillett, History of Presbyterian church, II, 517, 567.

<sup>31</sup> Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 155; Gillett, History of Presbyterian church, II, 525.

<sup>32</sup> Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 156.

<sup>33</sup> Beecher, Autobiography, II, 428.





brethren that the testimony of 1818 on the subject of slavery had gone too far;<sup>54</sup> and the committee on overtures, of which Dr. Witherspoon was chairman, held a large number of memorials on slavery until it was almost time for adjournment, and there-commended that they be returned to the house and the whole subject laid on the table.<sup>55</sup>

After a year of widespread discussion and debate, a large element of the church rallied to the support of the excised synods, and the lines between the Old School and the New School

<sup>54</sup>Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 525.

<sup>55</sup>Minutes 1837, 348ff. - Gillett contends that slavery was the prime motive in the whole process of separation, and charges that there was a tacit yet well understood log-rolling agreement between the excising party and the South. In general, the sympathies of the South were with the excising party, for it favored the system of ecclesiastical boards, opposed the liberalism of Barnes, Beecher, and others, advocated adherence to a strict orthodoxy, and acquiesced in the abrogation of the Plan of Union. But it was adamant on the subject of slavery; and though there was considerable antislavery sentiment in the Old School ranks, it was far weaker than that of the New School. Therefore the South chose the lesser of the two evils. The Old School party, on the other hand, absolutely required the Southern vote to give them a majority in the Assembly; and for this reason its leaders became more and more cautious in the expression of any antislavery views. Thus a sort of tacit bargain was struck. The Old School kept comparatively quiet on the question of slavery, and in return received the Southern support, which was absolutely essential in order to give them even a small majority in the Assembly; while the South voted with the Old School, with which it agreed in general, because it felt assured that the excising party could not afford to press the slavery question and also because the excised synods contained a considerable percentage of the antislavery sentiment of the church. In illustration of this, Dr. Wilson, of Cincinnati, when asked in 1837 if he were not planning to bring up the question of slavery, said he supposed something of the kind would be expected from him, in view of his previous strong antislavery declarations; but he added, "I believe that I shall let the Southern brethren manage their own concerns in their own way; they will probably take care of them the best." Gillett adds that "the most zealous antislavery men of the North felt, like Dr. Wilson, that in order to secure the triumph of the excising party a compromise, understood if not expressed, must be made. It was not an agreeable thing, indeed, but it had become a necessity." See Gillett, History of Presbyterian church, II, 525-528, for a



were very clearly and definitely drawn. A determined effort was made in the Assembly of 1838 to secure the reinstatement of the excised synods; and upon the failure of this attempt, the New School delegates, carrying with them approximately four-ninths of the membership, ministry, and property of the church, withdrew and organized a separate Assembly.<sup>36</sup>

Thus was the long-threatened division finally consummated; and the two resulting church bodies embarked upon the troubled ecclesiastical waters as separate voyagers. The consideration of their respective fortunes up to the outbreak of the Civil War, especially with regard to the slavery issue, will occupy the next two chapters.

full exposition of this theory.

<sup>36</sup>See Thompson, Presbyterians, 118-126, for a good description of the events of the Assembly of 1838, and the actual machinery and procedure of the separation.





## Chapter VI. - The Attitude of the Old School

After the division of 1837 and 1838, the Southern slaveholding Presbyterians, almost without exception, remained within the fold of the Old School.<sup>1</sup> In the North their example was followed by a large percentage of those who openly favored, apologized for, or were indifferent to, the institution of slavery. The active antislavery element in this branch of the church, therefore, was reduced to inconsiderable proportions; and as a result the attitude assumed towards the "peculiar institution" of the South was decidedly conservative. In one Assembly after another the issue was evaded, or the question tabled, or the consideration of the whole subject indefinitely postponed; and whenever any resolutions or utterances were adopted, they were always moderate in tone and semi-apologetic in sentiment. As Von Holst very aptly and very justly remarks: "The General Assembly of the Old School adopted the policy of the ostrich: when the slavery question was mentioned it shut its eyes and stuck its head in the sand. If it did not precisely plead for slavery, it thought that it could not be a sin under all circumstances."<sup>2</sup> A brief survey of the minutes of this Assembly will illustrate the effect of this policy.

For the first six years after the division all action on the slavery issue was successfully suppressed. In 1838

<sup>1</sup>Goodell, *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*, 162, states that the New School Assembly, at its first meeting in 1838, contained only three slaveholding commissioners. All the rest had remained with the Old School.

<sup>2</sup>Von Holst, *Con. and Political History of the United States*, II, 544.





several overtures dealing with the question of the slaves were received and laid on the table without debate.<sup>3</sup> During the two following years the Assembly took no action whatever with regard to the negroes. In 1841 the committee on bills and overtures reported that certain papers on slavery, which it deemed inexpedient to offer to the house, had been put into its hands; and it was proposed to return the documents to their authors. After a short discussion, the whole subject was indefinitely postponed.<sup>4</sup> The presbytery of Chillicothe presented a strong anti-slavery petition in 1842; but again the committee on bills and overtures reported that it was inexpedient for the Assembly to take any action on the subject. The paper was therefore left amongst a number of items of unfinished business to be referred to the next meeting.<sup>5</sup> But when in due course it came up in 1843,<sup>6</sup> it was simply tabled, and no further action was taken on it.

When the General Assembly of 1844 met at Louisville, Kentucky, the committee on bills and overtures again recommended that the subject of slavery be dismissed from its consideration. But this time a certain amount of opposition was encountered. A minority report was presented which expressed a want of concurrence in the opinion of the majority; and Dr. Gardiner Spring drew up another dissenting paper. Still a third protest, signed by seven delegates, stated that the proposed action would virtually deny

<sup>3</sup> Minutes, Old School, 1838, 25.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1841, 419. Throughout the whole period under consideration this committee seems to have acted as a buffer between the Assembly and the antislavery memorials and petitions which were constantly being presented. It was only very occasionally that such a paper reached the floor of the Assembly.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1842, 16, 18, 35.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 1843, 173.



and destroy the right of petition; that the character and number of the memorialists entitled them to more respectful consideration; that slavery was not only a political issue, but also a great moral question, in regard to which many people in the church anxiously desired to understand their duty; and that the report of the committee, if adopted, would be inconsistent with the testimony of the General Assembly of 1818. But in spite of all this opposition, a motion to lay the whole subject on the table, including all the papers relating to it, was carried by a vote of one hundred and fifteen to seventy.<sup>7</sup>

In 1845 the Assembly was fairly deluged with memorials relating to slavery; and the report of a special committee, ex-

<sup>7</sup> Minutes, Old School, 1844, 366-367, 376. An interesting indication of the attitude of the Presbyterian church in the South during this period is found in a "Report of the Committee of Correspondence With Southern Ecclesiastical Bodies on Slavery, To the General Association of Massachusetts," printed in 1842. In January of that year this committee addressed copies of a general letter to thirty Southern Presbyterian bodies, inviting them to a discussion on the slavery question and asking for suggestions concerning the course to be pursued by the Northern Church. The list was a very representative one, including two presbyteries in the District of Columbia, four in Virginia, five in Kentucky, seven in Tennessee, two in Missouri, three in North Carolina, one in South Carolina, two in Georgia, one in Alabama, and three in Mississippi. But only seven replies were received. One letter was simply remailed without comment of any kind; another came back with the remark written on it that "the presbytery are fully convinced that no good can result from a correspondence on the subject proposed;" and a third presbytery simply resolved that the subject be not entertained. The remaining four bodies submitted replies, in which they either defended the institution of slavery, or, though deprecating its evils, were unable to discern any satisfactory remedy. See the report of the committee, printed at Salem in 1844; and also W. E. Smith, Political History of Slavery, I, 73-74.





pressing the sentiments of the delegates, was adopted almost unanimously.<sup>8</sup> This paper sets forth very clearly the attitude of the Old School during the whole period preceding the Civil War. The memorialists are divided into three classes, including those who represent slavery as a great evil, and pray the Assembly to adopt measures for the amelioration of the condition of the slaves; those who urge the Assembly to allow a full discussion of the whole subject; and those who picture the institution as a heinous sin in the sight of God, and demand that the church shall discipline those members who maintain or justify the relation of masters to slaves.<sup>9</sup>

After making this preliminary classification, the views of the Assembly are elucidated as follows: "Do the Scriptures teach that the holding of slaves, without regard to circumstances, is a sin, the renunciation of which should be made a condition of membership in the church of Christ? It is impossible to answer this question in the affirmative, without contradicting some of the plainest declarations of the word of God....This Assembly cannot, therefore, denounce the holding of slaves as necessarily a heinous and scandalous sin, without charging the Apostles of Christ with conniving at such sin....In so saying, however, the Assembly are not to be understood as denying that there is evil connected with slavery. Nor would they by any means countenance the traffic in slaves for the sake of gain....The Assembly simply intend to say, that since Christ and his inspired Apostles did not make the holding of slaves a

<sup>8</sup>Minutes, Old School, 1845, 16. The vote was 168 to 15, with three members not voting.

<sup>9</sup>Minutes, Old School, 1845, 16.



bar to communion, we, as a court of Christ, have no authority to do so; since they did not attempt to remove it from the church by legislation, we have no authority to legislate on the subject. We feel constrained, further, to say, that however desirable it may be to ameliorate the condition of the slaves in the Southern and Western States, or to remove slavery from our country, these objects we are fully persuaded can never be secured by ecclesiastical legislation. Much less can they be attained by those indiscriminate denunciations against slaveholders, without regard to their character or circumstances, which have to so great an extent characterized the movements of modern abolitionists, which, so far from removing the evils complained of, tend only to perpetuate and aggravate them."<sup>10</sup>

Owing to the highly equivocal nature of this deliverance, and the storm of comment which it caused, the following Assembly felt constrained to resolve "that in the judgment of this house, the action of the General Assembly of 1845 was not intended to deny or rescind the testimony often uttered, by the General Assemblies previous to that date." The exact nature of this foregoing testimony, however, was not explained, al-

<sup>10</sup> Minutes, Old School, 1845, 16-17. This report was drawn up largely by Rev. N. L. Rice, one of the most prominent Presbyterian ministers in the Middle West, and is generally considered to be the classic deliverance of the Old School on the slavery question. See L. J. Halsey, History of McCormick Theological Seminary, 100-101; and Austin Willey, History of the Antislavery Cause in State and Nation, 277, for further discussions of the significance of this deliverance. Four years later, in 1849, four members of the Assembly stated in a signed protest that this deliverance of 1845, instead of benefiting the slaves, had only given relief to the consciences of slaveholders. See Thompson, Presbyterians, 135.





though it was asserted that it had been substantially the same for sixty years, and was considered capable of vindication from the word of God.<sup>11</sup>

In 1847 no action whatever was taken on the negro question; and in 1848, in answer to a memorial complaining that the attitude towards slavery had not been expressed with sufficient definiteness, and praying that whatever testimony had been borne against the institution might be published by the board of publication, the Assembly curtly resolved "that no additional publicity in regard to the action of this Assembly on the subject of slavery is necessary."<sup>12</sup>

Nothing daunted by this rebuke, the presbytery of Chillicothe again returned to the attack in the following year, and asked the Assembly not only to declare slavery to be a sin, but also to enjoin upon all interior courts a course of discipline which would remove it from the church. After a brief discussion, the Assembly declared, in substance, that in view of the civil and domestic nature of slavery, and the competency of the secular legislatures alone to remove it, it was deemed improper and inexpedient for a church judicatory to propose measures in aid of emancipation; that the action of former Assemblies had been steadily operating to ameliorate the condition of the slaves; and that the presbyteries in the slaveholding states were continuing and increasing their exertions for the religious instruction of the negroes.<sup>13</sup>

For several years the course of the Old School, as

<sup>11</sup>Minutes, Old School, 1846, 206-207.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 1848, 33-34.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 1849, 254-256.





outlined above, had been exciting a certain amount of comment amongst other religious bodies; and in the Assembly of 1850 a heated discussion was precipitated by the introduction of a paper from the General Association of Massachusetts, in which the latter body remonstrated at the lack of antislavery action by the Old School delegates. This document, as inserted in the minutes, reads as follows: "Resolved, that in maintaining correspondence and connection with the two General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church, we look with deep and fraternal solicitude upon the position of those bodies with respect to the sin of slavery: - that our strong sympathies are with such brethren, in those Assemblies, as are labouring, in an earnest and Christian spirit, to put an end to this evil; and that we desire our delegates to those Assemblies, in a decided but courteous manner, to express our deep conviction, that the rights of the enslaved, the course of true religion, and the honour of the Great Head of the Church, require those ecclesiastical bodies to use all their legitimate power and influence for the speedy removal of slavery from the churches under their supervision."<sup>14</sup>

The presentation of this paper created intense indignation amongst the members of the Assembly; and after some discussion it was resolved "that our Delegate to the next General Association of Massachusetts be directed to inform that venerable body, that this General Assembly must consider itself the best judge of the action which it is necessary for it to take as to all subjects within its jurisdiction; and that any interference

<sup>14</sup> Minutes, Old School, 1850, 473.



on the part of that General Association with its action upon any subject upon which this General Assembly has taken order, is offensive, and must lead to an interruption of the correspondence which subsists between that Association and this General Assembly."<sup>15</sup>

In the following year the Old School found itself in a peculiarly difficult dilemma owing to the passage of the fugitive slave law. If the church counselled neglect or disobedience of the law, the implication that there was a "higher law" would inevitably follow, and a very definite break with the slavery power would be necessitated; while to defend that law and demand obedience to it would be to affirm either that God's law justified slave-hunting, or that human law was of superior obligation. Both horns of the dilemma presented highly disagreeable possibilities; and therefore the Old School, in common with many other religious bodies, chose neither, but maintained instead a very discreet silence.<sup>16</sup>

This policy of maintaining silence on the slavery issue and of avoiding any agitation or discussion of the subject

<sup>15</sup> Minutes, Old School, 1850, 475. This motion, drawn up in characteristic Southern haste to resent any undue interference, was made by Rev. W.L. Breckinridge of Kentucky, and was adopted with only a very few dissenting voices. As Thompson remarks on page 137 of his History of the Presbyterian Church, it had the effect of telling the General Association, "in pious and diplomatic phrase, to mind its own business." Several foreign bodies, especially the Irish Presbyterian Church and the Free Church of Scotland, also remonstrated vigorously in their correspondence with the Old School Assembly; but their communications met the same result as that of the General Association. See Thompson, Presbyterians, 137.

<sup>16</sup> See Willey, History of Antislavery Cause in State and Nation, 376, for a description of this highly anomalous situation of the church.





was continued throughout the whole ensuing decade. During the long period from 1851 to 1860, inclusive, when the excitement over slavery was being fanned to a white heat in all parts of the country, the General Assemblies of the Old School took no action whatever which bore any significant or important relation to the situation. Since this branch of the church was strongly represented in the South as well as in the North, and since its various members consequently held widely divergent views concerning the sinfulness or justification of the system of slavery, this policy of repression and evasion seemed to be the only one under which these various elements could be held together; and therefore it was rigorously enforced.<sup>17</sup>

There can be no doubt that the Old School had travelled far from the deliverance of 1818 in its attitude towards slavery. The keynote of the deliverance of 1845 was contained in the fact that the church could not condemn the system without accusing the Apostles with conniving at it. Although it was recognized that there were certain evils connected with the institution, these were not considered inherent, and therefore were not sufficient to warrant the unqualified con-

<sup>17</sup> A careful search of the minutes covering this decade failed to disclose any important action of the Assembly in relation to slavery. Large numbers of memorials were presented at practically every session, but they were invariably handled without causing any definite action. Even mere discussion of the question of slavery was greatly curtailed. It seems to be very well established that the affairs of the Assembly throughout this period were dominated by Southern influence. In spite of this policy of suppression, however, the church grew very rapidly between 1840 and 1860. Thus the membership increased from 126,000 to 292,927; the number of presbyteries, from 95 to 171; the number of ministers, from 1504 to 2656; and the number of churches, from 1911 to 3531. Figures quoted from Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 569.



demnation of the whole system as sinful, or to justify the advocacy of emancipation. In this view slavery was no longer an evil contrary to the law of God and the gospel of Christ, but an institution which had come to be associated with certain remediable evils, about which the church need not greatly concern herself."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup>Thompson, Presbyterians, 135.



## Chapter VII. - Slavery and the New School

The composition of the New School branch of the church at the time of its formation in 1838, was far from homogeneous. In fact, at least four distinct elements might be clearly distinguished, including the Congregationalist faction, which was located largely in the four synods originally excinded in 1837; those Presbyterians who were repelled by the ultra-conservative conduct of the Old School; a small number of true friends of the church who sincerely regretted the division, and chose the New School as the lesser of two evils; and finally, the liberals, men like Barnes, Beecher, Beman, and Duffield, who formed the dynamic element in the combination. Although the lines between these various divisions became more and more vague and indistinct as time went on, they were not completely obliterated before the Civil War.<sup>1</sup>

In regard to slavery, the New School allowed far more discussion, and deprecated the existence of the institution far more unequivocally, than did the Old School. Practically every session of the Assembly witnessed an extended discussion of the subject, and the efforts to prevent a consideration of the question usually met with defeat.<sup>2</sup> But there was also a very strong pro-slavery element in the church which prevented the adoption of any decided antislavery action. Although the Northern faction was strong enough to procure the passage of several resolutions which deprecated the further continuance of slavery and voiced a clearly expressed disapproval of the evils of the system, these doctrines were not reduced to practice. The policy of referring

<sup>1</sup>Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 554.

<sup>2</sup>Barnes, The Church and Slavery, 68-70.





all matters calling for action to the lower church judicatories was early adopted, and often proved of great service to the Assembly in dealing with an especially awkward or embarrassing question.

This policy of adopting resolutions in opposition to slavery which it refused to reduce to actual practice gave rise to many charges of hypocrisy. Thus the Rev. F. A. Ross, one of the foremost Southern representatives of the New School, said in writing to Albert Barnes: "You have the stultified abstractions of the New School Presbyterian Church, while I have its common sense. You have its Delphic words. I have its actions."<sup>3</sup> The abolitionist writers of the day also reflect this sentiment.<sup>4</sup>

And yet these charges, although perhaps not wholly unmerited, must be regarded as largely exaggerated. Although it often seemed to apologize for slavery by adopting ambiguous and opportunist resolutions, and to overlook many of the evils connected with the system, the preponderating sentiment of the church was still opposed to the enslavement of the negroes.<sup>5</sup> But this sentiment was softened and weakened by a desire to adopt a middle course, to remain astride of the fence rather than to stand firmly on either side. Perhaps the best evidence of this opportunist tendency is found in the fact that in many cases the action of the Assembly failed to satisfy the more zealous antislavery men of the North and at the same time excited dissatisfaction at the South.<sup>6</sup>

Although

<sup>3</sup>Ross, Position of the Southern Church in Relation to Slavery, 21.

<sup>4</sup>Men like May, Johnson, Goodell, Garrison, and others, make frequent references to this idea.

<sup>5</sup>Thompson, Presbyterians, 133; Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 555; Greeley, American Conflict, 119.

<sup>6</sup>Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 555-556.



for the most part, then, the New School opposed slavery, it did so in words only; and not until a short time before the Civil War did it feel called upon to translate these words into deeds. By 1857, however, Albert Barnes was enabled to conclude that the position of the church might be summed up in the statement that "a man who is a slaveholder, is not, *prima facie*, in good standing in the Presbyterian church. It is a case for him to make out; not for him to assume to be true."<sup>7</sup>

In 1838 the New School Assembly was too busy in dealing with the question of the schism to pay any attention to slavery. But in the following year it at once struck the keynote of much of its later action by resolving "that this Assembly does most solemnly refer to the lower judicatories the subject of slavery; leaving it to them to take such order thereon as in their judgment will be most judicious and adapted to remove the evil."<sup>8</sup> This process of referring matters to the presbyteries and synods for solution was repeated again and again during the following years.

The Assembly of 1840 spent the greater part of three whole days in an extended discussion of the slavery problem. A

<sup>7</sup>Article in *Presbytery Reporter*, III, 430. In Missouri, by 1857, it was generally understood in church circles that the New School was definitely opposed to slavery; and since the public sentiment throughout the state was strongly in favor of the continuance of the system, many Presbyterians changed their allegiance from the New to the Old School, which was still maintaining a discreet silence on the subject. In St. Louis alone was there any considerable and organized antislavery sentiment remaining. See H. A. Trexler, *Slavery in Missouri*, 132-133, for a description of the situation in that state.

<sup>8</sup>Minutes, New School, 1839, 22.





determined attempt was made to win over this branch or the church to a definite antislavery attitude; but after much parliamentary maneuvering it was frustrated by the Southern faction, working in conjunction with certain Northern leaders. No less than six different sets of resolutions were introduced and debated. Finally, however, Dr. Cox moved an indefinite postponement of the whole subject, which was carried.<sup>9</sup>

When the Assembly met again after an interval of three years, the slavery problem was once more in the foreground. After the usual process of introducing, withdrawing, amending, and discussing various motions, it was at length resolved "that the Assembly do not think it for the edification of the church, for this body to take any action on the subject." This motion was justified by the fact that there was a great diversity of opinion amongst the delegates, and that therefore any expression of sentiment would carry but little weight, as it would be passed only by a small majority. It was also stated that the action of 1839, referring all matters connected with slavery to the lower judicatories, rendered any further deliverance unnecessary.<sup>10</sup>

In 1846, however, the whole subject of slavery was considered at great length. Besides the majority report of the committee on bills and overtures, two minority reports were also presented.<sup>11</sup> So many delegates were clamoring for an opportunity

<sup>9</sup>Minutes, New School, 1840, 10-19; all of these six resolutions proposed either to postpone, regard as inexpedient, or refer to the lower judicatories, any further action on slavery. The meetings of the Assembly were made triennial, instead of annual, during this same session; and at the close of the slavery debate Dr. Cox is said to have exclaimed, "Our Vesuvius is safely capped for three years." Goodell, Slavery and Antislavery, 157.

<sup>10</sup>Minutes, New School, 1843, 15-18.

<sup>11</sup>Minutes, New School, 1846, 15. One of these reports was presented by Rev. W. H. Beecher, and the other by Rev. George Duffield.



to address the Assembly on slavery that it was finally decided to call the roll and give each member a chance to express his opinion. This process consumed from two to five hours each day for eight consecutive days.

After this thorough discussion, one of the minority reports, a long document drawn up by Rev. George Duffield, was at length adopted by a decisive vote.<sup>12</sup> This paper constituted the most significant denunciation of slavery voiced by any Assembly since 1818; but it was tempered and rendered comparatively innocuous by the addition of various extenuating statements. It was declared that "the system of slavery, as it exists in these United States, is intrinsically an unrighteous and oppressive system, and is opposed to the prescriptions of the law of God, to the spirit and precepts of the Gospel, and to the best interests of humanity....We cannot therefore withhold the expression of our deep regret that slavery should be continued and countenanced by any of the members of our churches; and we do earnestly exhort both them and the churches among whom it exists, to use all means in their power to put it away from them.... Nor can any mere mitigation of its severity, prompted by the humanity and christian feelings of any individuals who continue to hold their fellow-men in such bondage, be regarded either as a testimony against the system, or as in the least degree changing its essential character."<sup>13</sup>

"But while we believe that many evils, incident to

<sup>12</sup>The vote stood: yeas, 92; nays, 29; not voting, 3. Minutes, New School, 1846, 28.

<sup>13</sup>Minutes, New School, 1846, 28. Two protests, signed by twenty-five names, were entered against the adoption of this portion of the deliverance.





the system, render it important and obligatory to bear testimony against it; yet would we not undertake to determine the degree of moral turpitude on the part of individuals involved in it." A broad line of distinction was thus drawn between the system and the individuals involved in it; and while the former was scathingly denounced, the latter were partially excused because "of all the embarrassments and obstacles in the way of emancipation." It was not considered justifiable to "exclude from the table of the Lord all who stand in the legal relation of masters to slaves," or to withhold "our ecclesiastical and christian fellowship from them." After asserting that the General Assembly possessed neither legislative nor judicial authority, which belonged exclusively to the sessions, presbyteries, and synods, it was finally concluded that "while we feel bound to bear our testimony against slavery, and to exhort our beloved brethren to remove it from them, as speedily as possible, by all appropriate and available means, we do at the same time condemn all divisive and schismatical measures, tending to destroy the unity and disturb the peace of our churches, and deprecate the spirit of denunciation, and that unfeeling severity, which would cast from the fold, those whom we are rather bound, by the spirit of the Gospel and the obligations of our covenant, to instruct, to counsel, exhort and try to lead in the ways of God."<sup>14</sup>

In 1849 nineteen petitions, all praying for more

<sup>14</sup> Minutes, New School, 1846, 29-30. Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 158, asserts that this whole deliverance of 1846 was confused, contradictory, and incongruous, and then continues, "Slavery is here characterized as unrighteous and oppressive; but this unrighteousness and oppression must not be promiscuously condemned, nor excluded from the table of the Lord, lest it should destroy the unity and disturb the peace of the church."





stringent action in opposition to slavery, were presented to the Assembly. After a lengthy debate, it was resolved to meet this demand by reaffirming the sentiments expressed in the minutes of 1815, 1818, and 1846. In addition, it was solemnly declared that civil liberty was the right of man; that the institution of slavery was unrighteous and oppressive; that it was the duty of all Christians to work for the complete abolition of slavery; and that the occurrence of any of the incidental evils of slavery within the church should be corrected by discipline.<sup>15</sup> But in the next paragraph the delegates felt themselves "bound to add, that there has been no information before this Assembly to prove, that members of our Church in the Slave-States, are not doing all that they can, (situated as they are in the providence of God,) to bring about the possession and enjoyment of liberty by the enslaved; nor are there any facts before us, to show that they are living in the violation of the duties growing out of their relations to slavery as it is continued in existence by the laws of their respective States; nor do we know that they tolerate any of those evils which ought to call forth the discipline of the church."<sup>16</sup>

Again in the following year the question of slavery occasioned a large amount of discussion, which continued for almost a week without leading to any definite action.<sup>17</sup> Finally, however, it was resolved "that we exceedingly deplore the working of the whole system of slavery as it exists in our country,

<sup>15</sup> Minutes, New School, 1849, 184-187.

<sup>16</sup> Minutes, New School, 1849, 188-189.

<sup>17</sup> In the meeting of 1849 it had been decided to hold the Assemblies annually, instead of triannually, as had been done since 1840.



and is interwoven with the political institutions of the slaveholding States, as fraught with many and great evils to the civil, political, and moral interests of those regions where it exists;" and "that the holding of our fellow-men in the condition of slavery, except in those cases where it is unavoidable, by the laws of the State, the obligations of guardianship, or the demands of humanity, is an offence in the proper import of that term." The actual matter of dealing with these offences, however, was again referred to the lower judicatories.<sup>18</sup>

By this time the discussion of the slavery problem had become a regular and well-established part of the work of the Assemblies; and the year 1851 proved to be no exception to the rule. For no sooner had the Assembly convened than Rev. Dennis Platt introduced a motion which sought to sanction resistance to the provisions of the fugitive slave law, by stating that "whilst obedience to law is a Christian duty, in all but extreme

<sup>18</sup> Minutes, New School, 1850, 324-325. The three exemptions mentioned were, of course, so broad as to include practically every form of slaveholding, and thus nullify the effect of the whole deliverance. In a speech delivered in the General Assembly of 1856, Rev. F. A. Ross brings out this fact by narrating a conversation between himself and Judge Jessup, one of the men who drew up this report. The conversation follows. Mr. Ross, "Do you allow that Mr. Aiken, of South Carolina, may, under the claims of humanity, hold three thousand slaves, or must he emancipate them?" Judge Jessup, "No man could rightly hold so many." Mr. Ross then continued, "Mr. Moderator, I think we had proof conclusive that those resolutions mean anything or nothing; that they are a fine specimen of Northern skill in platform-making; that it put in a plank here, to please this man, - a plank there, to please that man....It is a gum-elastic conscience, stretched now to a charity covering all the multitude of our Southern sins, contracted now, giving us hardly a fig-leaf righteousness." Ross, *Slavery Ordained of God*, 65-66. This whole work gives a very good idea of Southern opinion of the action of the Assembly. See also page 11 of this same work.





cases, yet no human enactments can bind any man to do that which he knows to be in conflict with the law of God."<sup>19</sup> After a long debate, however, this motion, together with several proposed amendments, was rejected; and it was discreetly declared that "the Assembly have reason to be thankful to Divine Providence for the wisdom and prudence vouchsafed to the last Assembly, in coming to conclusions on this vexed question,...and that it seems obviously our privilege and duty, at the present session, to leave the whole subject as it was placed by that action."<sup>20</sup> These same sentiments were practically repeated in the following year, when the various memorialists were simply referred to the preceding deliverances on the slavery question.<sup>21</sup>

When the Assembly met at Buffalo in 1853, it was decided to make an attempt to secure a certain amount of statistical data in relation to slavery, "in order to correct misapprehensions which may exist in many Northern minds, and to allay causeless irritation." With this end in view, the presbyteries in each of the slaveholding states were earnestly requested to procure and to present at the following meeting information concerning the following points: the number of slaveholders in connection with churches under their jurisdiction, together with

<sup>19</sup>Minutes, New School, 1851, 18.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, 19.

<sup>21</sup>Minutes, New School, 1852, 160-161. As a result of this action and that of the preceding years, a small branch of the church, under the leadership of Rev. John Rankin of the Chillicothe presbytery, situated in southern Ohio, broke away and formed an independent organization known as the Free Presbyterian Church. The most important tenet of the new church was that no slaveholder should be admitted to membership. At first there were only a few thousand members; but by 1860 it had spread into most of the Middle Western states. Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 214; Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 490.



the number of slaves held; the extent to which such slaves were held "by an unavoidable necessity imposed by the laws of the States, the obligations of guardianship, and the demands of humanity;" and the manner in which provision was made for the religious well-being of the enslaved.<sup>22</sup>

The passage of this resolution immediately aroused a storm of protest and indignation amongst the Southern delegates. It was asserted that such action was unconstitutional, that it was the result of an attempt to discipline the Southern churches, and that it was simply a scheme to ascertain certain facts which might subsequently be used against them. Three distinct papers were drawn up and presented, in which the position of the protestants was set forth at great length.<sup>23</sup> It was vehemently asserted that the inquisitorial demand of the Assembly would be openly defied, and that the desired information would not be forthcoming. In spite of this violent opposition, however, the resolution was not reconsidered, although all those who were "happily free from any personal connection with the institution of slavery" were exhorted "to exercise patience and forbearance towards their brethren less favored in this respect than themselves, remembering the embarrassments of their position."<sup>24</sup>

In 1854, in accordance with the prophecies of the previous year, not a single presbytery reported the information which had been sought; and the Assembly simply dropped the matter

<sup>22</sup>Minutes, New School, 1853, 333-334.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 334-337. These papers were drawn up by F.A. Ross, H.A. Rowland, and S.H. Cox. In a speech made in the Assembly, Ross offered a series of counter-resolutions, in mock imitation of those adopted. In these he asked the North to furnish information on a large variety of semi-humorous topics, ranging from the number of Northern church-members, who were concerned in building ships for the African Slave-trade, or who were





by voting to take no further action on the subject. This exhibition of docility aroused the ire of the antislavery men, who drew up a protest which was entered upon the minutes. It was claimed by these dissenters that the refusal to take any further action on slavery was virtually synonymous with saying that the Assembly was satisfied with the neglect in answering the inquiries of the previous year; that it must be construed into a willingness to cease all direct effort to disconnect itself from the sin of slavery; that it was a receding from the position theretofore assumed; and that it placed the church in the unenviable light of diminishing its efforts to eradicate the evil of slavery.<sup>25</sup> But inasmuch as the authors of this document were able to muster only twenty-eight signatures, they were powerless to change the general sentiment of the meeting.

The agitation of the question, however, did not stop here. For when the Assembly of 1855 met at St. Louis, no less than sixteen separate memorials were presented, "all complaining that the orders of the Assembly of 1853 have not been complied with, and all of them calling for action on the part of the Assembly."<sup>26</sup> After a protracted consideration of the whole matter, mingled with much hesitation, it was at length resolved "that a committee be appointed to report to the next Assembly on the constitutional power of the Assembly over the subject of slavenholding in our churches; and that we recommend that this evil be re-

descendants of former slave kidnappers, to the number of cruel or hen-pecked husbands. See Ross, *Slavery Ordained of God*, 13.  
<sup>24</sup>Minutes, New School, 1853, 333. See also Gillett, *History of Presbyterian Church*, II, 556ff.

<sup>25</sup>Minutes, New School, 1854, 505.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 1855, 29.





moved from our church, as soon as it can be done in a Christian and constitutional manner." In addition it was further voted to address a pastoral letter to all the churches under the jurisdiction of the Assembly, for the purpose of "reaffirming the testimony of past Assemblies in regard to the sinfulness of the system of slavery...and of expressing deep regret at the intemperateness of word and action that has too often characterized the spirit of those who have conscientiously aimed at its overthrow."<sup>27</sup>

When the committee which had been provided for in the above resolution reported to the following Assembly, it confined its remarks strictly to the constitutional powers of the highest church body, and carefully avoided any reflections upon the moral aspects of slavery. It was found that the Assembly possessed original jurisdiction only in matters of general review and control, and that it could reach a disciplinable offence only through the appearance of evidence from the records of a synod, or by means of citing a synod to appear before it in answer to charges of "any important delinquency, or grossly unconstitutional proceedings." Except for the hearing and adoption of this report, no action in regard to slavery was taken at this session.<sup>28</sup>

For a number of years the Southern ministers and churches had been attempting indignantly to curtail the protracted discussions and frequent resolutions on the subject of slavery; and in 1857 this sentiment was crystallized by the presbytery of Lexington, South, which issued an official notice to the Assembly,

<sup>27</sup> Minutes, New School, 1855, 29.

<sup>28</sup> A long and tedious minority report, which gave the Assembly larger powers in dealing with slavenolders, was also presented by A.H.H. Poyd, but met with no appreciative response. See Minutes, New School, 1856, 197-211, for full text of both these reports.



stating that many members of its churches, as well as a large number of ministers and elders, held slaves "from principle and of choice, believing it to be according to the Bible right," and that the presbytery sustained them in this position.<sup>29</sup>

The Assembly now met this situation squarely and unequivocally. By an overwhelming vote it proceeded to adopt a motion which dealt summarily with the recalcitrant presbytery. After recounting a long list of antislavery resolutions, stretching from 1787 to 1850, the paper continued: "We deem it our duty... to disapprove and earnestly condemn the position, which has thus been assumed by the presbytery of Lexington, South, as one which is opposed to the established convictions of the Presbyterian Church, and must operate to mar its peace and seriously hinder its property, as well as bring reproach on our holy religion; and we do hereby call on that presbytery to review and rectify their position. Such doctrines and practice cannot be permanently tolerated in the Presbyterian Church....It is at war with the whole spirit and tenor of the Gospel of love and good will, as well as abhorrent to the conscience of the Christian world. We can have no sympathy or fellowship with it; and we exhort all our people to eschew it as serious and pernicious error."<sup>30</sup>

As expected, the adoption of this document called forth a vigorous protest from the Southern delegates. The testimony of past Assemblies, it was true, had attacked the system of slavery more or less ambiguously, but had never attached any

<sup>29</sup> Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 557; Minutes, New School, 1857, 404.

<sup>30</sup> Minutes, New School, 1857, 403-404. The vote on the adoption of this resolution was 169 to 26. The whole tone of this Assembly was one of firmness and decision.





serious censure or odium to the individual slaveholder. But the present action was quite different; for it was deemed to be "such an assertion of the sin of slavery as degrades the whole Southern Church," and to constitute the virtual excising of the South. "Such indirect excision," it was added, "is unrighteous, oppressive, uncalled for - the exercise of usurped power - destructive of the unity of our branch of the Church - hurtful to the North and the South - and adding to the peril of the union of these United States."<sup>51</sup>

A special committee was appointed by the Assembly to draw up an answer to this protest. The report, as finally adopted, stated that the present action was in complete harmony with the past testimony of the church; that the individual slaveholder had never been exonerated from all blame because of his connection with the institution of slavery; that there was nothing about the present situation which was calculated to degrade or reflect upon the Southern Church; and that there was no thought of excising any portion of the church. It was significantly added, however, that "if our Southern brethren shall break the unity of the Church, because we stand by our former position, as in duty bound, the responsibility for the consequences will not rest on the Assembly."<sup>52</sup>

Upon their return home, however, the protestant Southern delegates were sustained by their respective presbyteries with great unanimity. But no hope was entertained of being able to induce the Assembly to modify materially the tone of its deliver-

<sup>31</sup>

Minutes, New School, 1857, 406-408. See also Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 557. This protest was drawn up by Rev. J.G. Hamner, and was signed by twenty-two other members.

<sup>32</sup>

Minutes, New School, 1857, 408-409.



ance; and the result was the voluntary withdrawal of a great majority of the Southern churches under the care of the New School Assembly. During the course of the year 1857 representatives from these various voluntarily exiled ecclesiastical bodies met and laid the foundations for the new United Synod of the Presbyterian Church. This new body, quite naturally, was composed very largely of slaveholders and slavery apologists; and therefore it became almost immediately the stronghold of the New School proslavery sentiment.<sup>53</sup>

Thus did the slavery problem within the church reach a crisis almost half a decade before a similar situation was presented to the nation. Although its policy had often been ambiguous and vacillating in the extreme, it was forced by the power of circumstances to define its position and to take a firm stand even before the exigencies of civil war rendered such a step absolutely imperative; and therefore it was one of the first bodies to throw off the incubus of the slavery element and to attain a comparative degree of internal harmony and unanimity of opinion.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 558.

<sup>54</sup> It is interesting to note the difference in rate of growth between the New School and the Old School during the period between the schism and the Civil War: The New School, with its more vacillating and less conservative policy, leaning steadily toward antislavery sentiments, and culminating finally in a comparatively early break with the system, seems to have lagged behind in the race for expansion. Thus in 1839 the Old School possessed 1339 ministers, 1933 churches, and 128,043 communicants; while the New School had 1189 ministers, 1586 churches, and 100,850 communicants. Twenty years later, in 1859, the Old School boasted of 2578 ministers, 3487 churches, and 279,600 communicants; but the New School could muster only 1558 ministers, 1543 churches, and 137,989 communicants. This gives an excess in favor of the Old School in 1839 of 149 ministers, 653 churches, and 27,193 communicants; and in 1859, of 1020 ministers, 644 churches, and 131,611 communicants. In other words, the clear gain of the Old School over the New





The action taken during the following three years was comparatively unimportant, and consisted mainly in reiterating and elucidating the doctrines set forth in 1857. Thus in 1858 nothing was done except to refer a few memorialists to the previous deliverances on slavery;<sup>35</sup> in 1859 a communication from the synod of Mississippi, announcing its withdrawal, was received without comment;<sup>36</sup> while in 1860 the only significant mention of the "peculiar institution" occurred in the report of the committee on church extension, in which the members refused to deny assistance to any church which still retained one or more slaveholders in its membership.<sup>37</sup>

School in twenty years was 891 ministers, 291 churches, and 114,418 communicants. It should be added, however, that part of this New School loss was due to the defection of the Free Presbyterian Church under John Rankin about 1850, and of the United Synod in 1857. Figures taken from the Presbytery Reporter, V, 228, for April, 1860; and Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 569.

<sup>35</sup> Minutes, New School, 1858, 591.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 1859, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 1860, 251.





## Chapter VIII. - The Church, the Slave, and the Dollar

There can be no longer any reasonable doubt that behind a vast number of the various forms of defending the system of slavery and of attacking the antislavery movement lay the power of the dollar mark. The entire industrial system of the South was constructed around this pivotal institution: for the mainspring of Southern industry was cotton; and the production of cotton, in turn, was absolutely dependent upon slave labor. The phenomenal prosperity and the very existence of the planter class, which dominated the affairs of the South, was utterly subject to the continuance of slavery; and in defense of its "peculiar institution" this Southern aristocracy built up a great system of silence and terrorism founded on that most despotic and most effective of all methods of human control, - public opinion.<sup>1</sup> Millions upon millions of dollars were invested in the bodies of negroes and in enterprises which could not be conducted without the labor of these blacks. All the manifold interests of the Southern man of affairs, and above all his property and financial interests, were wrapped up in slavery; and he did not intend to sacrifice these things without a bitter struggle.<sup>2</sup>

This attitude of the Southerner was soon reflected in the ranks of the Northern business-man. The cotton mills of the North drew their supply of raw cotton almost exclusively from Southern fields; and the best opinion of the day asserted

<sup>1</sup>See Caldwell, Slavery and Southern Methodism, 32-39, for a graphic description of the despotic control exercised by the slave-power, by one who lived in the midst of it.

<sup>2</sup>Albert Barnes, in The Church and Slavery, points out the close relation between the interests of the Southerner and his



that cotton could be raised on any large scale only by slave labor, owing to the peculiarities of the climate and of the general situation. Therefore it was feared in many quarters that the abolition of slavery would put a stop to this enormously profitable cotton traffic. In addition, the South was devoting its energies so completely to the production of cotton that it had no time for promoting other forms of industry; and this fact necessitated the purchase of tremendous quantities of supplies of all kinds from Northern manufacturers. When the enraged planters wrote to these manufacturers, threatening to cut off their best market, and demanded that the antislavery movement be stopped, the latter responded by appearing in the vanguard of the attack on abolitionism. The entire business system of the North, also, had become adjusted to the regime of slavery, and there was a strong tendency to resist any form of readjustment.<sup>3</sup>

A striking illustration of this attitude of the Northern business interests is given by May in an account of a conversation which took place between himself and a prominent New York manufacturer in 1835. In the course of the talk the

views on the slave question.

<sup>3</sup> Johnson, W.L. Garrison, 43; May, Recollections, 124ff., Ross, Slavery Ordained of God, 13ff. The writings of Birney, May, Johnson, Goodell, and other writers of the day are filled with references to the fact that the men of property and standing were usually the leaders in the attacks upon the anti-slavery cause. One of the most important methods of attack was the control of the press, both secular and religious. See May, Recollections, 129; Johnson, W.L. Garrison, 43; Garrison's, Garrison, I, 478; Birney, American Churches, 46; and Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 218, for instances of the manipulation of the press. The control of the pulpit by the same class will be taken up later.





the New Yorker said frankly; "Mr. May, we are not such fools as not to know that slavery is a great evil, a great wrong. But it was consented to by the founders of our Republic. It was provided for in the Constitution of our Union. A great portion of the property of the Southerners is invested under its sanction; and the business of the North, as well as the South, has become adjusted to it. There are millions upon millions of dollars due from Southerners to the merchants and mechanics of this city alone, the payment of which would be jeopardized by any rupture between the North and the South. We cannot afford, sir, to let you and your associates succeed in your endeavor to overthrow slavery. It is not a matter of principle with us. It is a matter of business necessity. We cannot afford to let you succeed." "And May adds that "he had not spoken for himself, or any number of the moving spirits of that commercial metropolis alone. He was warranted in saying what he did by the pretty general intention of the gentlemen of property and standing throughout the country to put a stop to the antislavery reform."<sup>4</sup>

There are many indications in the literature of the period which tend to show that the influence of these business interests was one of the most potent factors in shaping the course of the churches on the slavery question. Consciously or unconsciously, the great body of the clergy adopted the viewpoint of the leading members of their congregations. Or, as May phrases it, "the shepherds were driven by the sheep."<sup>5</sup> Besides occupying the most prominent pews in the churches, and contributing most liberally to the support of the ministry and the various mission-

<sup>4</sup>May, Recollections, 127-128.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 329.



ary and other benevolent organizations, these men of property frequently constituted a majority of the responsible officers of the different church bodies. They were too important to be alienated; and therefore in many respects they were perforce allowed to direct the policy of the churches, including that of the clergy, on the question of slavery.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the Honorable William Jay, a prominent Episcopalian layman, remarked that of all the sermons delivered at the North during the ante-bellum period, not one in a thousand contained the slightest allusion to the duties of Christians towards the colored population;<sup>7</sup> while in another place we find the statement that not one minister in a hundred ever lifted his voice against the enslavement of the negroes.<sup>8</sup> In the South, of course, the clergy formed one of the main supports of the system, and championed and justified its continuance with great unanimity.<sup>9</sup> A considerable number of Southern clergymen, in fact, were themselves slaveholders;<sup>10</sup> and in some cases churches even held slaves

<sup>6</sup> Greeley, American Conflict, 121; Johnson, W.L. Garrison, 43; May, Recollections, 329. Johnson, W.L. Garrison, 43, states rather quaintly and naively that "the pulpit was thus sorely tempted to swerve from the laws of humanity and rectitude and become the apologist if not the defender of slavery. When I say that it often yielded to this temptation, or, where it did not fully yield, was seduced into a scarcely less guilty silence, I set down naught in malice, but only record the truth of history for the instruction and warning of other generations."

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Johnson, W.L. Garrison, 249.

<sup>8</sup> May, Recollections, 365.

<sup>9</sup> Birney, American Churches, 6, mentions the fact that up to 1842, so far as was known, at least, none of the slaveholding religious bodies had ever protested to, or remonstrated with, any of the state legislatures because of the passage of the various iniquitous laws designed to assist in the regulation of the slaves.

<sup>10</sup> President Blanchard, of Knox College, at Galesburg, Illinois, estimated that about 1850 approximately 650,550 slaves were owned by members and ministers of Protestant churches in the United States. At \$400 each, (a low estimate), the aggregate value of these slaves would be \$260,220,000. This human





in their corporate capacities.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, there is abundant evidence to show that when a minister did espouse the antislavery cause, the act often led to unpleasant consequences. Thus we read that the pastor of a church in the suburbs of Boston lost his pulpit because he delivered a lyceum lecture to the colored people of Boston, and because he persisted in remembering the slaves in his public prayers. The leading members of his parish were Boston merchants, and they told him plainly that such a course of action had destroyed his usefulness in that church.<sup>12</sup> In 1835 another young and popular minister delivered a very able arraignment of the institution of slavery, and promised to give a copy of it to an agent of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society for publication. When, however, the agent called for it a few days later, the young minister stated that he had concluded not to publish his discourse, for "some of the most prominent members of our church have earnestly advised me not to give it to the press." "It is not for me to say what their motives are," he continued, "for they are among my best friends, and the most

property was distributed amongst the various denominations as follows: Presbyterians, 77,000; Methodists, 219,500; Baptists, 115,000; Episcopalians, 88,000; other Protestants, 50,000. These figures are based upon the United Census reports and upon statistics of various religious bodies. They are quoted in Willey, History of the Anti-slavery Cause in State and Nation, 111.

<sup>11</sup>For instance, Birney, American Churches, 6, reprints the following advertisement, taken from the "Charleston Courier" of February 12, 1835: "Field Negroes, by Thomas Gadsden. On Tuesday, the 17th inst., will be sold, at the North of the Exchange, at 10 o'clock, a prime gang of ten negroes, accustomed to the culture of cotton and provisions, belonging to the Independent Church, in Christ's Church Parish."

<sup>12</sup>Johnson, W.L. Garrison, 71.





respectable members of my parish. I am bound to give heed to their counsel."<sup>13</sup> Many other instances of a similar nature tend to render extremely plausible the statement that "no clergyman of that day, however eminent, could have espoused the abolitionist cause without risking the loss of his parish and his reputation at the same time."<sup>14</sup>

An interesting glimpse into the Southern opinion of the Northern attitude is given by Rev. F. A. Ross, of Alabama, when he says, "Why do your church-members and philanthropists buy Southern products at all? You know you are purchasing cotton, sugar, rice, sprinkled with blood, literally, you say, from the lash of the driver? Why do you buy? What's the difference between my pilching this blood-stained cotton from the outraged negro, and your standing by and taking it from me? You, yourselves, say, in your abstractions, there is no difference; and yet you daily stain your hands in this horrid traffic. You hate the traitor, but you love the treason."<sup>15</sup> This attitude of resenting the Northern assumption of moral superiority by accusing many Northerners of hypocrisy was quite common throughout the South.<sup>16</sup>

The widespread defense of slavery throughout the country rendered the discovery of a number of proslavery argu-

<sup>13</sup> May, Recollections, 146.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, W. L. Garrison, 71.

<sup>15</sup> Extract from a speech delivered before the New School General Assembly at Buffalo in 1853.

<sup>16</sup> That this attitude was perhaps not so utterly unwarranted as might appear at first sight may be noted from the fact that in 1836 the Presbyterian Church had \$94,000 invested in the Southwestern banks, because the unprecedented briskness of the domestic slave trade offered a prospect of obtaining more than six percent interest. Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 154.



ments imperative and essential. Especially in the South were arguments of every hue and degree of validity produced in support of the enslavement of the negroes. Most of these specimens of logic, however, began their careers in the guise of objections to the abolition crusade which developed in the early thirties. Therefore a brief summary of the orthodox and frequently-enount-ered arguments against abolition may not be out of place at this point.

These standard reasons for opposing abolition may be summarized very briefly as follows: "Immediate emancipation would be dangerous; the slaves would slaughter their masters if set free; they are not prepared for freedom; they are content-ed and happy in their present situation, and probably wouldn't accept their freedom if it were offered to them; they ought to be taken back to Africa, and not set free in this country; the Bible sanctions slavery; the curse of Ham doomed his posterity to a lasting bondage, and the Scriptures must be fulfilled; the chosen people of God held slaves by Divine permission; Jesus did not condemn slavery, and Paul expressly sustained the system by sending the slave Onesimus back to his master; the agitation of the subject would divide the churches and divert their at-tention from religious work; the abolitionists are too indiscrim-inate in their denunciations; the slaves are property, and it would be unjust to take them away from their masters without com-pensation; the Constitution guarantees the existence of slavery, and without such a guarantee the Union never could have been formed; the discussion of the subject is dangerous to the peace of the country, and tends towards a dissolution of the Union."<sup>17</sup>





There were, of course, others as well; but these were the ones most frequently mentioned.

Out of these incipient modes of reasoning on abolition grew the later well-developed and logically valid arguments with which the Southerner sought to justify his "peculiar institution." One of the most elaborate of these constructions of logic consisted in treating slavery as an institution, tracing it back to the very roots and origins of society, and picturing it as existing under practically all the known societies of the world. Another emphasized the physiological and mental inferiority of the negro race. A third set forth the good of the white man, as promoted by the efficiency of slavery in causing a larger production than could be obtained without it. The social well-being of the South was often mentioned as another justification of slavery, since the climate forbade hard labor on the part of the whites. A fifth very potent reason for the continuance of the institution lay in the fact that it was considered absolutely essential to the safety of the whites. As a result of these various arguments, slavery soon came to be regarded as a positive good, rather than as a system of doubtful justice that must remain simply because it was ineradicable. But the crowning triumph of proslavery logic lay in the authority of the Scriptures. This was the central citadel of the defense, and the one which constantly withstood all attacks.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> This summary is taken from Johnson, W.L. Garrison, 159-160. May, Recollections, 330, also mentions a list of similar arguments.

<sup>18</sup> Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 138-151, contains an excellent summary of these proslavery arguments. W.A. Smith, Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery, gives a finely-spun philosophical argument in favor of slavery. There are many other works which contain extended arguments seeking to justi-



The Biblical justifications of slavery were taken both from the Old and the New Testaments. In the former the two provisions most frequently cited were the various verses which dealt with the buying and holding of bondmen and bondmaids, and the curse of Ham. Since the chosen people of God were not only permitted but enjoined to hold slaves, and since Noah, presumably with authority from on high, said in the book of Genesis, "Cursed be Canaan, the son of Ham, a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren," it was argued that slavery must be an institution approved by the Deity.<sup>19</sup>

In the New Testament the writings of the Apostle Paul furnished the great stronghold of the proslavery advocates. The exhortation to all servants to obey their masters, of course, was strongly emphasized. The Epistle to Philemon, in which Paul speaks of sending back the runaway slave Onesimus to his master Philemon, was also frequently mentioned as a triumphant vindication of the fugitive slave law. And there was in addition the inferential argument that Christ and his Apostles never specifically condemned the institution of slavery, though they lived in the midst of it all their lives.<sup>20</sup>

fy and defend the system.

<sup>19</sup> The Old Testament verses most frequently cited in support of slavery were: Genesis, IX, 18-26; Exodus, XX, 17, XXI, 4, 20, 21; and Leviticus, XXV, 39, 44-46. See Rhodes, History of the United States, I, 370; Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 139; and De Bow's Review, IX, 284-286.

<sup>20</sup> The following were the New Testament verses most frequently quoted in this connection: 1 Corinthians, VII, 20; Ephesians, VI, 5; 1 Timothy, VI, 1; Philemon 10-16; and 1 Peter, II, 18-24. See Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 141; Rhodes, History of the United States, I, 370; De Bow's Review, IX, 283-286; and the Presbytery Reporter, III, 246.





The defense of slavery was often carried to absurd lengths by the extreme apologists of the system. It was frequently stated, for instance, that the African slave-trade was a great blessing to the negroes, for it removed them from their own benighted continent and placed them in the very midst of the world's foremost degree of culture and advancement. Thus the negro was enabled to make at one step the transition from savagery to civilization which the white race had achieved only after centuries of development. And the most valuable feature by far of this sudden and involuntary metamorphosis was the fact of the Christianization of the blacks. By some writers the slave-trade was even hailed as a great missionary enterprise.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup>May, Recollections, 330. In 1844 Benjamin Brantly of Penfield, Georgia, published over the signature of "A Baptist Minister," an anonymous work entitled "Slavery: A Treatise Showing That Slavery Is Neither a Moral, Political, nor Social Evil." The following outline of the topic headings will convey some idea of the elaborate and almost syllogistic form of the argument:

- I. Slavery is not a moral evil, because
  - A. Slavery is not an immorality itself, because
    1. It is directly sanctioned by the letter of the Scriptures, and
    2. It is not indirectly forbidden by the spirit of the Scriptures.
  - B. Slavery has not an immoral tendency, because
    1. Lawful dependence of fellow-creatures upon slaveholders is a help, rather than a hindrance, to advancement in holiness of masters.
    2. Slavery does not tend to make the masters proud, angry, cruel, selfish, or licentious.
- II. Slavery is not a political evil, because
  - A. It does not prevent the accumulation of wealth.
  - B. It does not oppose the supremacy of the law.
  - C. It does not hinder the increase of public intelligence.
- III. Slavery is not a social evil, because
  - A. Slaveholders more likely to be friendly to each other.
  - B. Slaveholders more likely to be dignified in intercourse with each other.
  - C. Slaveholders more likely to be polished in man-





Even the Declaration of Independence and the Golden Rule did not escape the attacks of the advocates of slavery. Thus the affirmations in the second paragraph of the former that "all men are created equal" and that "they are endowed by their Creator with unalienable rights," were vigorously denied; while the phraseology of the latter was changed to read, "All that ye ought to expect or desire of others, in similar circumstances, do to them."<sup>22</sup>

The relation of master to slave was often claimed to be strictly analogous to that of parent to child, or of husband to wife. It was undeniable, it was said, that there were grave abuses in connection with all these relationships. But since no  
ners.

Slaveholders more likely to be hospitable.

IV. American Slavery has not been an evil to the negroes themselves, because

- A. In moral, physical, and intellectual condition they are better off in American than in Africa.
- B. In moral, physical, and intellectual condition the negroes of the South are better off than those of the West Indies.

The thoroughly irrelevant and fallacious nature of most of these arguments is apparent at a glance. The author, however, was firmly convinced of their absolute validity, and was "filled with compassion in behalf of our Northern brethren who are possessed with this evil spirit" of antislavery sentiment; and he was even willing "to contribute liberally to sending a missionary among them, who might place slavery before them upon the ground on which it stands in Scripture, and thus expel their unhappy delusions." The pamphlet literature of the day is filled with similar extreme and incongruous ebullitions. Perhaps the best statement of the sane and reasonable side of the case for slavery is contained in the "Proslavery Argument," a symposium published at Charleston in 1852 by Walker, Richards, and Company. See bibliography for other titles.

<sup>22</sup>See Ross, Position of the Southern Church, 15-17, and Slavery Ordained of God, 161.



sane-minded person ever thought of abolishing the last two, why discriminate against the first? Rev. F. A. Ross voiced this feeling when he said, "For every sigh, every groan, every tear, every agony of stripe or death, which has gone up to God from the relation of master and slave, there have been more signs, more groans, more tears, and more agony in the rule of the husband over the wife....He who will make the horrid examination will discover in New York City, in any number of years past, more cruelty from husband to wife, parent to child, than in all the South from master to slave in the same time."<sup>25</sup>

Such were the main arguments employed by the extreme and unqualified defenders of the institution. But there was also a far smaller and more conservative class of men who merely apologized for the system, instead of seeking to justify and defend it as intrinsically righteous and desirable. These persons admitted freely that there were grievous evils connected with slavery, that many of the laws designed to regulate it were iniquitous and oppressive, and that it would have been better if slaves had never been introduced into the country. But they refused to go further and assert that slaveholding, in itself, was sinful, and that it ought to be destroyed by immediate emancipation. Though comparatively small in number, this class was composed largely of men of considerable influence and integrity of character; and since they were far more rational and open-minded than the extremists on both sides of the argument, they wielded a power in moulding public sentiment which was

<sup>25</sup>Ross, *Slavery Ordained of God*, 53. Extract from a speech delivered on the floor of the New School General Assembly, of 1856.





totally out of proportion to their number.

Perhaps the most widely known spokesman of this coterie of apologists amongst the Presbyterians was the Rev. N. L. Rice. A Southern man who spent most of his later life in the North, he typified with peculiar faithfulness the best feelings of the group which he represented. In the last of a series of ten letters on slavery, he sums up his attitude thus: "The conclusion to which we are forced is that circumstances have existed which justified men in holding slaves....If you say the Slave Trade is an abominable wickedness, whether carried on at home or abroad, I agree with you. If you affirm, that Slavery is a great evil, which philanthropists and Christians ought to seek to remove from the country, I agree with you again. If you assert, that many of the laws which regulate Slavery are oppressive and unjust, and ought to be changed, I still agree with you. If you say, that the Slaves are our fellow men, rational, accountable, immortal, and that we are bound to do what we can to promote their present and future happiness, I heartily agree with you. If you go further, and assert, that slave-holding, without regard to circumstances, is sin, and that all Slaveholders ought to be excluded from the Church of Christ, I cannot agree with you. Neither my Bible, my reason, nor my observation, will allow me to agree with you."<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup>N.L.Rice, Ten Letters on the Subject of Slavery, 46-47. These letters, written in 1855, while Dr. Rice was pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church at St. Louis, were addressed to the delegates from the Congregational Associations to the General Assembly of that year. These delegates had remonstrated with the Assembly because of its alleged proslavery attitude and the opposition of the Presbyterian Church to abolitionism and also attempts to defend its general course in regard to slavery. See W.E.Dodd, The Fight for the Northwest, American Historical Review XVI, 782, for a sketch of the activities of Dr. Rice in connection with the slavery question; also Halsey, History of McCormick



## Chapter IX. - The Final Overthrow of Slavery.

When the General Assembly of the Old School met at Philadelphia in May, 1861, its action with regard to secession was awaited throughout the country with keen interest. The long preceding period of discreet silence on the subject of slavery,<sup>1</sup> the marked proslavery tendency of its utterances before 1850, and the great extent and influence of its Southern affiliations, rendered the attitude of this branch of the church exceedingly doubtful in the crisis then impending.<sup>2</sup> And the Assembly, immediately upon convening, did, in fact, find itself in a very difficult and complicated situation. The Northern members wanted to adopt a firm and specific declaration of loyalty to the federal government, while the Southern adherents attempted frantically to maintain the former policy of silence and inaction; and for a time there was a deadlock.<sup>3</sup>

The issue, however, could no longer be evaded; for "upon the Assembly of that year (1861) the long-deferred question of slavery pressed with the weight of an avalanche....It might, indeed, decline to recognize loyalty to established government as a Christian virtue; but, if it did so, its course would be repudiated by the great mass of its Northern constituents." With a

Theological Seminary, 91-117.

<sup>1</sup>There had been no important deliverance on slavery since 1850.

<sup>2</sup>The action of the Assembly at this time possessed considerable political significance, as tending to reflect the sentiments of the great body of Presbyterians which it represented; and the new administration at Washington is said to have intimated that a firm declaration of loyalty would greatly strengthen the position of the federal government. Thompson, Presbyterians, 151.

<sup>3</sup>See Spring, Personal Reminiscences, 186, where the author states, "there was a strong combination of a powerful minority to shut out all discussion and all action on the state of the country."





full realization of this fact, the Assembly finally voted, after a bitter and protracted discussion, to declare its adherence to the national government. "No longer blinded by zeal to maintain its Southern alliance, - the prospects and advantages of the continuance of which were more than questionable, - the Assembly vindicated its loyalty, and manifested its repugnance to a rebellion, initiated in the interests of slavery, by appropriate resolutions."<sup>4</sup>

These expressions of the sentiment of the Assembly, usually known as the Spring Resolutions, after the name of their author, Dr. Gardiner Spring of New York, were adopted only after ten days of bitter debate and sharp parliamentary practice.<sup>5</sup> In their final form, however, they reflected a steadfast purpose to

<sup>4</sup>Gillett, History of Presbyterian Church, II, 569.

<sup>5</sup>Minutes, Old School, 1861, 329-335; Spring, Personal Reminiscences, 187-203. Some conception of the exceedingly tedious and tortuous course pursued by these resolutions may be secured from a brief resume of the history of their passage. The facts are taken from the two sources mentioned above. On Saturday, the third day of the session, Dr. Spring attempted to secure the appointment of a special committee to draw up an expression of devotion to the Union. The matter was first laid on the table, then taken up from the table, and finally made an order of the day for the ensuing Tuesday. But on Tuesday no action was taken on it. The next day Dr. Spring offered his own resolutions, in substantially the same form in which they were finally adopted. Their consideration was made the first order of the day for the following Friday. "In the interval," says Dr. Spring, "strenuous efforts were made...to induce me so to modify my resolutions, as to be more conciliating to the Southern members. "No change, however, was made. On Friday, immediately after taking up Dr. Spring's paper, Dr. Hodge offered a substitute; and the discussion of the two papers occupied the greater part of the whole day, as well as Saturday morning, when it was made the order of the day for Monday. All day Monday the discussion continued unabated, until finally on Monday evening Dr. Hodge withdrew his substitute, and Dr. Wines offered another. A motion by Dr. Hodge to lay the whole subject on the table was lost, 153-87. Tuesday morning the papers by Dr. Spring and Dr. Wines were referred to a special committee; and in the afternoon of the same day a majority report, with eight of the members of the committee concurring, was made which rejected Dr. Spring's paper. The ninth member of the committee, however,





support the national administration. After setting aside July first as a special day of prayer, and invoking the Divine guidance and blessing upon the officers of the government and upon the Congress about to assemble, the document continued; "Resolved, That this General Assembly, in the spirit of that Christian patriotism which the Scriptures enjoin, and which has always characterized this Church, do hereby acknowledge and declare our obligations to promote and perpetuate, so far as in us lies, the integrity of these United States, and the Federal Government in the exercise of all its functions under our noble Constitution; and to this Constitution, in all its provisions, requirements, and principles, we profess our unabated loyalty. And to avoid all misconception, the Assembly declare that by the terms 'Federal Government,' as here used, is not meant any particular administration, or the peculiar opinions of any particular party, but that central administration, which being at any time appointed and inaugurated according to the forms prescribed in the Constitution of the United States, is the visible representative of our national existence."<sup>6</sup>

The adoption of this resolution created intense and widespread indignation throughout the South. After entering several protests upon the minutes of the Assembly,<sup>7</sup> many of the Southern delegates returned home and began at once to take active

offered a minority report consisting essentially of Dr. Spring's resolution. The majority report was rejected by the Assembly, and the discussion continued till adjournment. On Wednesday morning it was at length resolved to take a final vote at 6 P.M. of the same day. When the hour for voting came, the majority report was again rejected, 128-84; and then the minority report, consisting essentially of Dr. Spring's original paper, was finally adopted, 156-66.

<sup>6</sup>Minutes, Old School, 1861, 329-330.

<sup>7</sup>See Minutes, Old School, 1861, 330ff., for text of these protests. They all asserted that the action of the Assembly in adopting the Spring Resolutions was unconstitutional and virtually ex-scinding, as well as tyrannical in purpose.



steps to insure the secession of the Presbyterian churches in the Confederate states. As a result of the ensuing agitation, forty-seven presbyteries, comprising ten synods, dissolved their connection with the General Assembly during the summer and autumn of 1861.<sup>8</sup>

The resolution drawn up by one of these bodies, typical of all the rest, in justification of such secession, read as follows: "Resolved, That in view of the unconstitutional, Erastian, tyrannical, and virtually excising act of the late General Assembly, sitting at Philadelphia, in May last, we do hereby, with a solemn protest against this act, declare, in the fear of God, our connection with the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States to be dissolved."<sup>9</sup>

After several months of preparatory planning, ninety-three representatives of these forty-seven Confederate presbyteries met in the First Presbyterian Church at Augusta, Georgia, and on December 4, 1861, organized the "Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America."<sup>10</sup> One of the first acts of this new ecclesiastical body was to adopt a long and formal "Address to All the Churches of Jesus Christ Throughout the Earth," in which the reasons for the separate organization of the Southern Assembly were set forth in elaborate detail.<sup>11</sup> It was stated

<sup>8</sup>Palmer, Life and Letters of J.H.Thornwell, 502; White, Southern Presbyterian Leaders, 322.

<sup>9</sup>Palmer, Life and Letters of J.H.Thornwell, 502.

<sup>10</sup>White, Southern Presbyterian Leaders, 322-324; Palmer, Life and Letters of J.H.Thornwell, 504. An interesting illustration of the predominantly British ancestry of the Southern Presbyterians is found in the fact, mentioned by White, that of the 93 delegates, 59 were Scotch or Scotch-Irish, 27 were English, and only 5 were Huguenots.

<sup>11</sup>This address was drawn up by Rev.J.H.Thornwell, and in many respects is a model of faultless style and precision of statement. Considering the circumstances under which it was com-





that the Philadelphia Assembly had resolved itself into little more than a body of political factions, whereas the affairs of church and state should be kept distinctly separated; that the Southern presbyteries wished an opportunity to give full and free development to the spiritual principles of the church of their fathers; and that in its ecclesiastical capacity the Southern church was neither the friend nor the foe of slavery. "The policy of the existence or the non-existence of slavery," it was continued, "is a question which belongs exclusively to the state. We have no right, as a church, to enjoin it as a duty, or to condone it as a sin." A decided opinion, however, was expressed to the effect that slaveholding was not a sin, that it was sanctioned by the Bible, and that the spiritual and material condition of the negroes had been greatly improved by their transportation to America. On the morning of the tenth day of the session this address was read once more, and then signed with great solemnity by every member of the Assembly.<sup>12</sup>

With the troublesome Southern element out of the way, the Old School Assembly maintained during the remainder of the war a consistent and decided testimony against slavery and in

posed, it is remarkably moderate and tolerant in tone. Rev. Thornwell was one of the leaders of the Southern Presbyterian pulpit, who believed firmly in the political and constitutional theories of Calhoun and Hayne, but who felt that the affairs of church and state should be kept rigorously separated. This general attitude is reflected in the Address. See Palmer, Life and Letters of J.H. Thornwell, 482-488.

<sup>12</sup> On page 329 of his Southern Presbyterian Leaders, H.A. White gives a picturesque description of this impressive ceremony. For the complete text of the Address, see Thompson, Presbyterians 388ff; Palmer, Life and Letters of J.H. Thornwell, 504ff.; or White, Southern Presbyterian Leaders, 326-329. It was also proposed to adopt a special letter to be sent to the Northern Assembly alone, and Rev. Thornwell even went so far as to draw up a rough draft of such a letter; but for some reason it was never even introduced into the Assembly. Palmer, Life and



support of the Union. In 1862, and again in the two succeeding years, resolutions were adopted which decried the further continuance of slavery and expressed the utmost confidence in the national administration. Upon several occasions veiled and cautious expressions of regret for the long period of silence on the slavery question crept into the deliverances; but for the most part it was intimated that the Assembly was merely continuing and strengthening a long-felt opposition to the enslavement of the negroes.<sup>13</sup>

The New School Assembly, having reached and passed the crisis in its slavery relations in 1857, threw itself heart and soul into the struggle for the preservation of the Union. In 1861 a resolution was adopted which vigorously denounced the policy of secession, reaffirmed the guilt of slaveholding, and pledged the full power of the church to the support of the administration. A copy of this resolution was forwarded to the President of the United States.<sup>14</sup> With only enough variation to take into account the exigencies of the changing aspects of the war, this same process was repeated by the Assemblies of the ensuing four years. Altogether, the Civil War record of the New School is one of unflinching devotion to the Union and of loyal support of the administration of Lincoln.<sup>15</sup>

Letters of J.H.Thornwell, 508.

<sup>13</sup>See Minutes, Old School, 1862, 625; 1863, 55; and 1864, 296-299.

<sup>14</sup>Unqualified confidence in the ability and actions of Lincoln seems to have characterized the expressions of both the New and Old School Assemblies throughout the war.

<sup>15</sup>The references to the war in the minutes of the New School Assemblies in question are as follows: 1861, 446-448; 1862, 23-27; 1863, 241-245; 1864, 465-467; 1865, 36-43.





When we pass to a consideration of the events of the war from the Southern standpoint, we find that the clergy of the South played an exceedingly significant part in the affairs of the Confederacy. In many respects, in fact, it is certainly no exaggeration to state that the Southern clergy formed the very backbone of the rebellion. Thus Dr. Gardiner Spring, who sympathized with the Southern viewpoint until the very eve of the war, and who was closely connected with many prominent Confederate clergymen,<sup>16</sup> states that "the melancholy fact must be recorded, that the ministers of the Gospel in the South were, if not the instigators, the great supporters of the rebellion, and that, without their influence, the political leaders must have abandoned their bloody enterprise....The fact is notorious....that on the church and clergy of the South, uniting their influence with their leading politicians, rests the responsibility of the war.... Men of distinguished ability, and with talents fitted to control the popular will, gave utterance to views which not only justified and counselled the rebellion, but instigated and urged it with all the enthusiasm and vehemence of the pulpit, and all the weight of their personal and official character."<sup>17</sup> In April, 1863, a convention of Confederate ministers, assembled at Richmond, Virginia, adopted an "Address to Christians Throughout the World," which vigorously championed the conduct of the war and the principles of the Confederacy.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Spring, Personal Reminiscences, II, 177-179.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 180. See also Thompson, Presbyterians, 158, for a number of expressions of Southern ecclesiastical opinion during the war.

<sup>18</sup>This address was signed by 96 ministers, 28 of whom were Presbyterians. It was printed in pamphlet form, and was given wide circulation throughout the South.





And in the operation of this martial ecclesiasticism the Presbyterian ministers were constantly in the vanguard. Years after the war one of the Confederate generals stated that "the services of Dr. Palmer were worth more to the rebel cause than a soldiery of ten thousand men."<sup>19</sup> A list of the influential supporters of the rebellion would include the name of practically every well-known Presbyterian minister in the South.<sup>20</sup> The Southern Assembly authorized and encouraged the work of special Presbyterian chaplains in the Confederate army; and at one time one hundred and forty ministers were engaged in this evangelistic work amongst the troops.<sup>21</sup> The total strength of the Southern Assembly consisted of about one hundred thousand members, fourteen hundred churches, and one thousand ministers; and throughout the course of the war the utmost power of the full resources of the church was brought to bear in support of the Confederacy.<sup>22</sup>

But at last there came a time when the Confederacy was forced to lay down its arms and to feel the bitter sting of defeat. Human strength could endure no longer; and with sorrowing hearts and pitifully inadequate resources the South began the wearisome process of reconstruction. In the dark and comfortless days which followed, the clergy of the South, and not least among them the Presbyterian ministers, were again the leaders of the people,

<sup>19</sup> Spring, Personal Reminiscences, 180.

<sup>20</sup> A partial list of such men given in H.A. White, Southern Presbyterian Leaders, includes the names of J.H. Thornwall, B.M. Palmer, R.L. Dabney, J.L. Wilson, J.H. Smith, Stuart Robinson, J.N. Waddell, and Moses Drury Hoge. In addition the Confederate generals "Stonewall" Jackson, D.H. Hill, and Thomas R.R. Cobb were prominent Presbyterian elders.

<sup>21</sup> H.A. White, Southern Presbyterian Leaders, 342-343. These men did not replace the regular chaplains, but worked in addition to the latter. White gives an interesting description of the religious revivals which prevailed amongst the Confederate armies, especially in the winter camps. Dr. J. Leighton Wilson, as quoted by White, says in this connection, "That our camps should have



stirring them on to renewed efforts and consoling them with pictures of future success and reward.<sup>23</sup>

And so came the close of the war of liberation and preservation, and with it the fulfillment of the process of emancipation. At length the goal of more than a half-century of strife and agitation had been attained. And as we take a brief retrospective glimpse at the events of this period of the anti-slavery movement, what shall be our final verdict concerning the attitude of the church, and of the Presbyterian church in particular, towards the institution of slavery?

Of one thing, at least, we may be absolutely certain. The church was not, in any sense of the word, the leader in the antislavery movement. Had it, in actual fact, placed itself in the van of the emancipation agitation, had it thrown the tremendous weight of its influence and resources into the scales against slavery, there can be no doubt that the "peculiar institution" must have succumbed long before 1860. Albert Barnes states, with much show of reason, that "it is probable that slavery could not be sustained in this land if it were not for the countenance, direct and indirect, of the churches."<sup>24</sup> And R. E. Thompson says in volume six of the American Church History Series: "It was the unfaithfulness of the American churches, and not least of the Presbyterian churches, to the plain requirements of duty, which suffered the evil to grow and gather head, until its end

been made nurseries of piety is something not only new and unprecedented in warfare, but may be regarded as an encouraging token of God's purpose to favor and bless our future Zion."

<sup>22</sup>White, Southern Presbyterian Leaders, 331. Although it adhered strictly to the policy of the official separation of church and state, all the utterances of the Southern Assembly evince the most inflexible loyalty to the Confederate cause.

<sup>23</sup>H. A. White, Southern Presbyterian Leaders, 343-344, gives a graphic





came in a deluge of human blood."<sup>25</sup>

But if it did not occupy a prominent place in the anti-slavery ranks, what shall we say of its position as tending to render a considerable degree of support, either directly or indirectly, to the continuance of slavery? Here again the case is clearly against the church; for it is undeniably true that its attitude assisted very materially in strengthening the hands of the slavery power. Contemporary writers like May, Goodell, Birney, Barnes, and Horace Greeley assert repeatedly that the action of the church was such as to fortify the system of slavery against the attacks of the antislavery advocates.<sup>26</sup> These views are typified by Barnes when he affirms that "it cannot be doubted that the views, entertained and expressed by Christian ministers and by others connected with the Christian Church, in fact, do much to sustain slaveholders in their own views."<sup>27</sup> Further corroboration of these contentions is furnished by a recent writer who remarks: "Churches then, as now and in history generally, were on the side of the 'biggest battalions' of wealth and power. It is no wonder that Lincoln could not bring himself to join any religious denomination; for one thing is certain, had the great cause which he represented been left to a plebiscite of the churches, it would have been overwhelmingly defeated."<sup>28</sup>

description of the unceasing activity of many leading Presbyterian ministers during the gloomy days of reconstruction.

<sup>24</sup>Barnes, *The Church and Slavery*, 28.

<sup>25</sup>Thompson, *Presbyterians*, 135.

<sup>26</sup>See May, *Recollections*, 332, 344, 365; Goodell, *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*, 215; Birney, *American Churches*, 46-48; Barnes, *The Church and Slavery*, 28-40; and Greeley, *The American Conflict*, 121, for statements of this character.

<sup>27</sup>Barnes, *The Church and Slavery*, 30.

<sup>28</sup>W.E. Dodd, *The Fight for the Northwest*, *American Historical Review*, XVI, 784. Von Holst, *Con. and Political History of the United States*, II, 230, states his belief that the American churches, on the whole, went as the masses went, and that they simply re-



And yet it would be decidedly unfair to say that the church was the bulwark of slavery. For there was always a considerable number of church-members who earnestly advocated emancipation and who worked zealously to procure the overthrow of slavery. In the vast majority of cases, in fact, the ranks of the antislavery factions were filled by persons who were actively connected with some ecclesiastical organization.<sup>29</sup> But the number of such people, in comparison with the vast body of the church, was so insignificant that they were powerless to affect in any important sense the attitude of the whole; and therefore it must still remain true, in general, that the church, if not the active supporter and apologist, was at least the not unwilling spectator, of the great drama of slavery.

flected, and in fact were a part of public opinion. This view becomes highly reasonable when we consider the important part played by the laity in our American churches.

<sup>29</sup>Birney, James G. Birney, 296-300; Lay, Recollections, 332; Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 444.



## APPENDIX

Chronological Resume of the Official Action of the  
American Presbyterian Church on Slavery.

From the Earliest Times Up to

1865.

The numbers on the left refer to the date; those on the right, to the page references in the minutes.

I. The Synod of Philadelphia and New York.

- 1774. Voted to assist in sending two missionaries to Africa.-  
456.
- 1780. Brief discussion of slavery during a review of the  
minutes. No definite action. - 201.
- 1786. Decided that the children of Christian slaves ought  
to be baptized. - 527.
- 1787. Recommended abolition of slavery, but only after  
slaves had been properly trained and edu-  
cated for the responsibilities of freedom. -  
540.

II. The General Assembly.

- 1793. Memorial on Slavery from Warner Mifflin, a Quaker,  
handed to the Assembly, which voted to pub-  
lish the minutes of 1787. - 76.
- 1794. Adopted a note to the eighth commandment, to be  
printed under the one hundred and forty-  
second question in the larger catechism,  
in the Confession of Faith, which placed  
slaveholding under the same head as man-  
stealing. - 89.
- 1795. Advised slaveholding and non-slaveholding church-  
members to continue to reside in Christian  
fellowship with each other, and not to allow  
the churches to become divided on the  
question of slavery. Expressed itself as  
favoring emancipation, but not until the  
slaves were deemed ready for the change.-103.
- 1815. Again expressed regret over the continuance of slav-  
ery, and recommended a definite religious  
education of the blacks. - 582.
- 1816. Decreed that it was the duty of masters to present  
the children of slaves for baptism; but di-  
rected the erasure of the vote to the eighth  
commandment, adopted in 1794, which put  
slaveholding in the same class as mansteal-  
ing, on the ground that it had been adopted  
unconstitutionally. - 617.
- 1818. The classic antislavery deliverance of the church. In  
a long and elaborate document, slavery was  
severely denounced and its abolition  
recommended as soon as the slaves could be





- trained to appreciate the privileges and responsibilities of freedom. - 688.
1835. Report of a special committee on slavery referred to the next Assembly for consideration. - 490. (In the long interval since 1818 there had been practically no definite action, and only a comparatively small amount of discussion).
1836. After some discussion, it was decided to postpone indefinitely the consideration of the whole subject. - 272.
1837. Large number of antislavery memorials laid on the table. - 348.

### III. The General Assembly of the Old School.

1838. Three overtures on slavery laid on the table without debate. - 25.
1841. Consideration of slavery question indefinitely postponed. - 419.
1842. Several antislavery petitions left among a number of items of unfinished business to be referred to the next Assembly. - 16.
1843. Unfinished business of preceding session laid on the table. - 173.
1844. After considerable discussion, whole slavery question laid on the table. Protest presented. - 366, 376.
1845. Adopted long resolution stating that the Assembly could not denounce slaveholding as sinful without thereby charging the Apostles with conniving at such sin. Did not desire to countenance or to excuse the evils connected with the system; but felt that the correction of these abuses was a matter for secular, not ecclesiastical legislation. Deprecated severely the indiscriminate denunciations of the abolitionists. - 16.
1846. Adopted committee report claiming that the attitude of the Assembly towards slavery had remained substantially unchanged for sixty years; that the resolution of 1845 was not intended to rescind or to destroy the previous testimony of the church; and that no further action was required. - 206.
1848. Resolved that "no additional publicity in regard to the action of this Assembly on the subject of slavery is necessary." - 33.
1849. Large number of antislavery memorials presented; but it was deemed "improper and inexpedient for this Assembly to attempt or propose measures in the work of emancipation," because the secular legislatures alone were competent to abolish slavery. - 254.
1850. In answer to further antislavery petitions, it was affirmed that the previous and repeated declarations of the Assembly upon the subject of slavery were such as to render any additional



action unnecessary. The General Association of Massachusetts, which had expressed grave concern over the apparent proslavery tendency of the Assembly, was piously yet firmly rebuked for meddling in affairs over which it possessed no authority. - 473.

- 1851-1860, inclusive. No action, and but very little open discussion, of the slavery problem.
1861. After a bitter and protracted debate, the Assembly adopted the "Spring Resolutions," which expressed devotion to the Union, loyalty to the federal government, and confidence in the national administration. - 329.
1862. Denounced the rebellion and signified strong desire to support the federal cause. - 625.
1863. Declared that the Assembly had never departed materially from the antislavery sentiments expressed in 1818. - 55.
1864. Acknowledged that "we have all much to confess and lament as to our shortcomings in this respect. (adherence to the deliverance of 1818) But stated that there was no longer a place for slavery, and that it was doomed to destruction. Expressed confidence in the ultimate victory of the federal arms. - 296.

#### IV. The General Assembly of the New School.

1839. Subject of slavery referred to the lower judicatories, "to take such action thereon as in their judgment will be most judicious and adapted to remove the evil." - 22.
1840. After the introduction and discussion of no less than six different resolutions, all of which deprecated any further action, the consideration of the whole subject of slavery was indefinitely postponed. - 10ff.
1843. Since there was "great diversity of opinion as to the proper and best mode of action on the subject of slavery," and since therefore "any expression of sentiment must operate to produce alienation and division," it was declared that "we do not think it for the edification of the church for this body to take any action on the subject." - 15.
1846. Adopted long set of resolutions which denounced slavery as unrighteous, oppressive, and opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, and deprecated its countenance by members of the church. But at the same time it was declared to be highly inadvisable to attempt to exclude slaveholders from the table of the Lord or the fellowship of the churches; and all matters of discipline, as before, were committed to the lower judicatories. - 28-31.
1849. Reaffirmed sentiments expressed in 1815, 1818, and 1846; stated that slavery was cruel and un-





- righteous, and should be abolished as soon as practicable, while certain incidental evils of the system should be remedied at once; but possessed no information "to prove that members of our church in the slave states are not doing all that they can, (situated as they are in the providence of God,) to bring about the possession and enjoyment of liberty by the enslaved." - 185.
1850. Declared that slaveholding was an offence in the proper ecclesiastical import of that term, "except in those cases where it is unavoidable, by the laws of the State, the obligations of guardianship, or the demands of humanity." Jurisdiction over such offences was again referred to the sessions and presbyteries. - 324.
1851. Asserted that "it seems obviously our duty and privilege, at the present session, to leave the whole subject as it was placed by the action" of the last Assembly. Attempt to secure a denunciation of the fugitive slave law defeated. - 13, 18.
1852. Large number of memorialists simply referred to previous action of the Assembly. - 160.
1853. Reaffirmed doctrine of 1850, exhorted the antislavery workers to exercise patience and forbearance in dealing with the situation, and asked the slaveholding presbyteries to gather authentic information concerning the extent of the evil within the church. This last clause called forth loud and indignant protests from the Southern members. - 333-338.
1854. Southern presbyteries refused absolutely to give the information called for in 1853; but in spite of much agitation, the Assembly took no action whatever on any phase of slavery. - 505.
1855. In a pastoral letter addressed to all the churches under its care, the Assembly reaffirmed the testimony of the past concerning the sinfulness of slavery. A committee was also appointed to examine into the constitutional power of the Assembly over the subject of slaveholding in the church. - 29.
1856. Committee presented elaborate report on the constitutional power of the Assembly in regard to slaveholding. No further action. - 197.
1857. Assembly summarily rebuked the presbytery of Lexington, South, for its open justification of slavery, and declared that such an attitude could not be tolerated. The Southern delegates protested stoutly against this action, but the majority refused to reconsider the matter. As a result, most of the slaveholding presbyteries withdrew from the General Assembly and organized the "United Synod." - 403ff.



- 1858. Memorialists simply referred to previous action. - 591.
- 1859. Assembly simply reaffirmed the sentiments of preceding years. - 45.
- 1860. Committee on church extension refused to deny assistance to any church which still contained one or more slaveholders. - 258.
- 1861. Denounced secession, expressed undiminished attachment to federal government, declared complete confidence in national administration, reaffirmed desire for abolition of slavery, recommended nation-wide prayers for all the officers in positions of responsibility, and sent a copy of the resolutions to the President. - 446.
- 1862. Expressed belief that slavery was the underlying cause of secession; and repeated expressions of confidence in Lincoln. - 23.
- 1863. Commended Lincoln for the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. Declared fervently that the rebellion must be put down at all costs. - 241.
- 1864. Repeated former principles, so far as applicable to contemporary situation, and recognized the hand of God in the victories of the federal armies. - 465.
- 1865. Gave thanks for triumphant conclusion of the war, expressed grief over assassination of Lincoln, realized responsibility of the church in the work of reconstruction, and advocated the grant of the right of suffrage to the negroes. - 36.





## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Only those titles which have been actually used in the preparation of this work are included in the following list. Although by no means complete, it contains, with a few exceptions, all the important and suggestive works which deal with the Presbyterian church in its relation to slavery. The abbreviated form in which names frequently referred to appear in the footnotes is found indented just under the full title in each case. Each of the three subdivisions of the complete list is arranged alphabetically by authors.

## Documentary Material

- Baird, S. J., Collection of Acts, Deliverances, and Testimonies of the Supreme Judicatory of the Presbyterian Church, From Its Origin in America to the Present Time. Philadelphia, 1855.
- Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America, Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, Form of Government, Book of Discipline, Directory for Worship, and Administrative Acts of the Assembly of a General Nature. Philadelphia, 1910.
- Digest of the Records of the General Assembly, and Synod of New York and Philadelphia. Philadelphia, 1820.
- Engles, W.M., (Editor), Records of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, from 1706 to 1789. Philadelphia, 1841. Records, 1786, etc.
- Engles, W.M., (Editor), Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, 1789-1820. Philadelphia, 1847. Minutes, 1795, etc.
- Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. (Published in annual volumes, 1820-1837). Philadelphia. Minutes, 1835, etc.
- Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Old School. (Published in annual volume after 1837). Philadelphia. Minutes, Old School, 1845, etc.
- Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. New School. (Published in annual volumes after 1837). Philadelphia. Minutes, New School, 1853, etc.





- Moore, W.E., (Editor), New Digest of the Acts and Deliverances of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Philadelphia, 1861.
- Moore, W.E., (Editor), The Presbyterian Digest: A Compound of Acts and Deliverances of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. Philadelphia, 1873.
- Report of the Committee of the General Assembly for Revising the Forms of Government. Philadelphia, 1819.
- Roberts, W.H., (Editor), The Revised Book of Discipline. Philadelphia, 1884.

#### Contemporary Material

- An Address to Christians Throughout the World. (By a convention of Southern ministers). Richmond, 1863.
- American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Report of Committee on Antislavery Memorials. Boston, 1845.
- American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of One Thousand Witnesses. (Published by the American Anti-slavery Society.) New York, 1839.
- Ashton, Robert, Works of John Robinson, With a Memoir. 3 volumes. Boston, 1851.
- Baird, Robert, Progress and Prospects of Christianity in the United States, With Remarks on the Subject of Slavery in America. London, 1851.
- Baird, Robert, Religion in America: An Account of the Evangelical Church in the United States. New York, 1856.
- Barnes, Albert, The Church and Slavery. Philadelphia, 1857.
- Barnes, Albert, Evidences of Christianity in the Nineteenth Century. New York, 1868.
- Barnes, Albert, An Inquiry Into the Scriptural views of Slavery. Philadelphia, 1846.
- Beecher, Catherine, Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, With Reference to the Duty of American Females. Philadelphia, 1837.
- Beecher, Charles, Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher. 2 volumes. New York, 1866.
- Beecher, Edward, Narrative of the Riots at Alton. Alton, 1838.
- Beecher, H.W., Plymouth Pulpit Sermons. 4 volumes. Boston, 1875.
- Birney, J.G., American Churches the Bulwarks of American Slavery. Boston, 1845.
- Birney, American Churches.
- The Border States, Their Power and Duty in the Present Disordered Condition of the Country. Baltimore, 1860.
- Brownlow and Pryne, Ought American Slavery To Be Perpetuated? Philadelphia, 1858.
- Bushnell, Horace, Sermons For the New Life. New York, 1858.



- Caldwell, J.H., Slavery and Southern Methodism. Newman, Georgia, 1866.  
 Channing, W.E., Slavery. Boston, 1836.  
 Cheever, G.B., The Scriptures on the Guilt of Slaveholding. New York, 1860.  
 Cobb, T.R., An Inquiry Into the Law of Negro Slavery. Philadelphia, 1858.  
 ----- Defense of Southern Slavery Against the Attacks of Henry Clay and Alexander Campbell. Hamburg, South Carolina, 1851.  
 Dresser, Amos, Narrative of Amos Dresser. New York, 1836.  
 Fletcher, John, Studies on Slavery. Natchez, Louisiana, 1852.  
 ----- Fresh Catalogue of Southern Outrages Upon Northern Citizens. New York, 1860.  
 Gale, G.W., Articles of Faith and Covenant of the Presbyterian Church in Galesburg, Illinois. Galesburg, Illinois, 1849.  
 Goodell, William, Slavery and Antislavery. Boston, 1859.  
 Goodloe, D.R., The Southern Platform. Boston, 1858.  
 Grimke, Sarah, American Slavery As It Is. New York, 1839.  
 Helper, The Impending Crisis. New York, 1860.  
 Hodge, C.A., Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church. 2 volumes. Philadelphia, 1851.  
 Jay, William, Miscellaneous Writings on Slavery. Boston, 1853.  
 Jefferson, Thomas, Notes on the State of Virginia. London, 1787.  
 ----- Liberty. (Compiled by Ames, J.R.) Philadelphia, 1837.  
 Lovejoy, J.C. and Owen, Memoir of Reverend Elijah P. Lovejoy. New York, 1838.  
 Marsh, L.R., Writings and Speeches of Alvan Stewart on Slavery. New York, 1860.  
 Martineau, Harriet, Society in America. 3 volumes. London, 1837.  
 Matlack, L.C., Secession: Personal Narrative of Proscription for Being an Abolitionist. Syracuse, 1856.  
 May, S.J., Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict. Boston, 1869.  
 ----- May, Recollections.  
 Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom. 2 volumes. New York, 1862.  
 ----- Presbyterian Recorder Monthly. St. Louis, 1855-56.  
 ----- Presbyterian Expositor. Chicago, 1857-59.  
 ----- Presbyterian Magazine. Philadelphia, 1851-60.  
 ----- Presbytery Reporter. Alton, Illinois, 1856-64.  
 ----- Proceedings of the Convention of Radical Abolitionists. New York, 1855.  
 ----- Proslavery Argument. (Symposium.) Charleston, 1852.  
 Rankin, John, Letters on American Slavery. Newburyport, Virginia, 1836.  
 ----- Report of the Committee of Correspondence With Southern Ecclesiastical Bodies on Slavery, To the General Association of Massachusetts. Boston, 1858.  
 ----- Revolution or Reform. Boston, 1856.  
 Rice, N.L., Signs of the Times. St. Louis, 1855.  
 Rice, N.L., Ten Letters on the Subject of Slavery. St. Louis, 1856.  
 Rockwell, J.E., Sketches of the Presbyterian Church. Philadelphia, 1854.





- Ross, F.A., Slavery Ordained of God. Philadelphia, 1859.  
 Smith, W.A., Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery.  
 Nashville, Tennessee, 1856.  
 Sprague, W.B., Memoirs of Rev. John McDowell and Rev. William Mc  
 Dowell. New York, 1864.  
 Spring, Gardiner, Personal Reminiscences of the Life and Times  
 of Gardiner Spring. 2 volumes. New York,  
 1866.  
 Spring, Reminiscences.  
 Stringfellow, Thornton, Scriptural and Statistical Views in  
 Favor of Slavery. Richmond, 1856.  
 Sunderland, L.R., Testimony of God Against Slavery. Boston, 1856.  
 Van Evrie, J.H., Negroes and Negro Slavery. New York, 1861.

### Secondary Material

- Birney, William, James G. Birney And His Times. New York, 1882.  
 Briggs, C.A., American Presbyterianism. New York, 1885.  
 Brown, W.G., Lower South in American History. New York, 1902.  
 Campbell, T.G., Sufferings of the Rev. T.G. Campbell and His  
 Family in Georgia. Washington, 1877.  
 Donald, W.E., The Fight For the Northwest. American Historical  
 Review, XVI, 774.  
 Foote, W.H., Sketches of North Carolina, Historical and  
 Biographical. New York, 1846.  
 Foote, W.H., Sketches of Virginia, Historical and Biographical.  
 Philadelphia, 1849.  
 Garrison, W.P. and F.J., William Lloyd Garrison. 4 volumes.  
 New York, 1885-89.  
 Garrisons, Garrison.  
 Gillett, E.H., History of the Presbyterian Church in the United  
 States of America. 2 volumes. Philadelphia,  
 1873.  
 Gillett, History of Pres. Ch.  
 Greeley, Horace, The American Conflict. Hartford, 1864.  
 Halsey, L.J., History of McCormick Theological Seminary.  
 Chicago, 1893.  
 Harris, N.D., History of Negro Slavery in Illinois. Chicago,  
 1906.  
 Hart, A.B., American History Told By Contemporaries. IV,  
 59-97. New York, 1903.  
 Hart, A.B., Slavery and Abolition. New York, 1906.  
 Hays, G.P., Presbyterians: Popular Narrative of Their Origin,  
 Progress, Doctrines, and Achievements. New  
 York, 1892.  
 Henry, H.M., Police Control of the slave in South Carolina.  
 Emory, Virginia, 1914.  
 Herbert, H.A., The Abolition Crusade And Its Consequences.  
 New York, 1912.  
 Hodge, A.A., Life of Charles Hodge, Professor at Princeton.  
 New York, 1880.  
 Howe, George, History of the Presbyterian Church in South  
 Carolina. Columbia, South Carolina, 1870.



- James, C.F., Documentary History of the Struggle For Religious Liberty in Virginia. Lynchburg, Virginia, 1900.
- Jameson, J.F., American Acta Sanctorum. American Historical Review, XIII, 286-302.
- Kennedy, W.S., Plan of Union; or, a History of the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches of the Western Reserve. Hudson, Ohio, 1856.
- Norton, A.T., History of the Presbyterian Church in the State of Illinois. St. Louis, 1879.
- Palmer, B.M., Life and Letters of Rev. James Henry Thornwell. Richmond, 1875.
- Prime, S.I., Memoirs of Rev. Nicholas Murray. New York, 1863.
- Schaff, Phillip, Church and State in the United States. New York, 1883.
- Siebert, W.H., The Underground Railroad From Slavery to Freedom. New York, 1899.
- Smith, E.L., Henry Boynton Smith, His Life and Work. New York, 1881.
- Smith, W.H., Political History of Slavery. 2 volumes. New York, 1903.
- Sprague, W.B., Annals of the American Pulpit. 10 volumes. New York, 1856-59.
- Stearns, L.F., Life of Henry Boynton Smith. Boston, 1892.
- Tanner, Henry, The Martyrdom of Lovejoy. Chicago, 1881.
- Thompson, R.E., Presbyterians. American Church History Series, VI. New York, 1902.
- Trexler, E.A., Slavery in Missouri, 1804-1865. Baltimore, 1914.
- Webster, Richard, History of the Presbyterian Church in America, From Its Origin to 1760. Philadelphia, 1857.
- White, H.A., Southern Presbyterian Leaders. New York, 1911.
- Willey, Austin, History of the Antislavery Cause in State and Nation. Portland, Maine, 1886.
- Wilson, Henry, Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America. 2 volumes. Boston, 1878.







UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 082199164